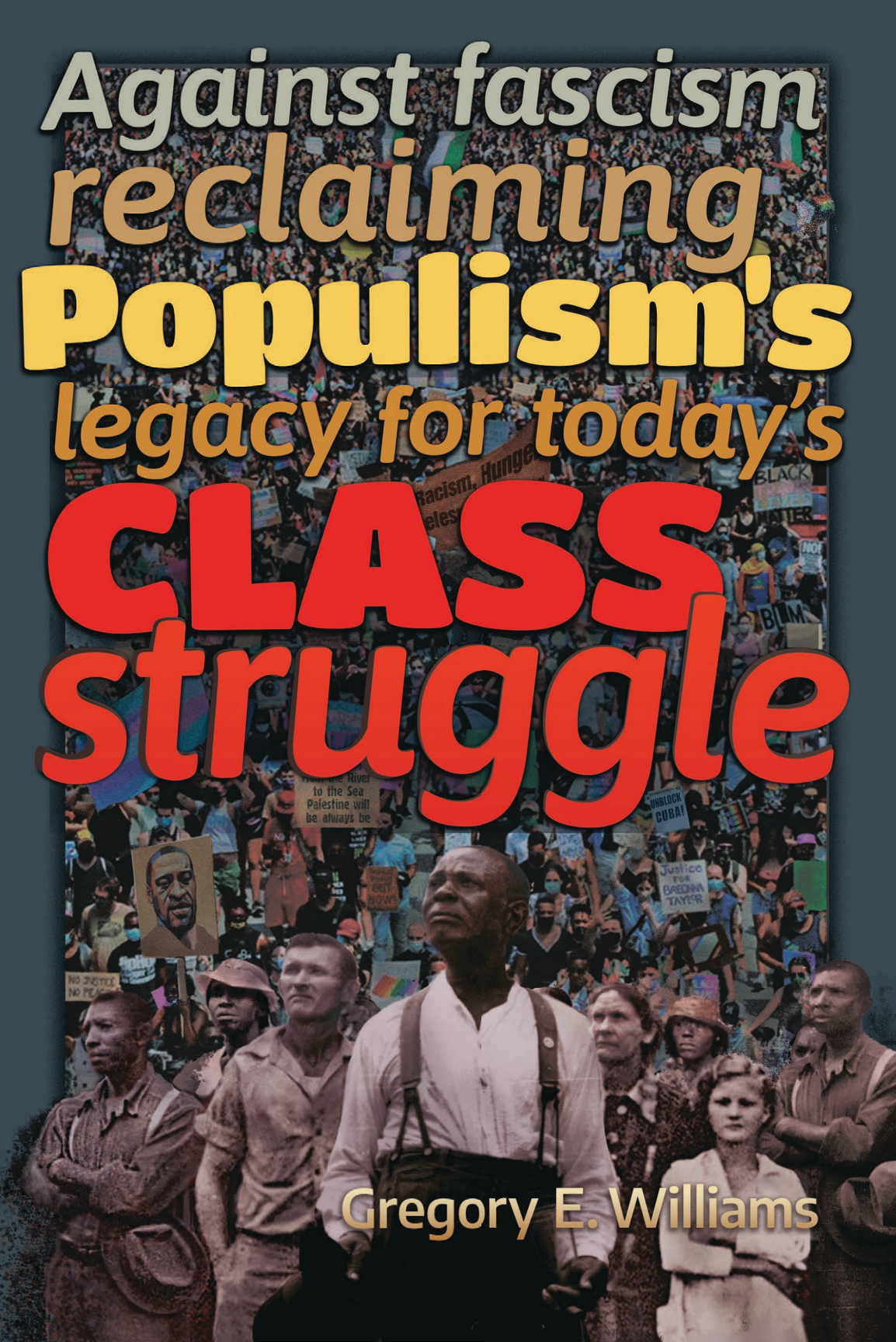
Against fascism reclaiming Populism's legacy for today's CLASS struggle



Gregory E. Williams

Against fascism:
Reclaiming **POPULISM***'s legacy for today's* **CLASS** *struggle*

Gregory E. Williams

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Look at who they serve

This book came together because of dialogue with many comrades in the Struggle for Socialism Party. In the leadup to Louisiana's 2023 gubernatorial election, which was won by MAGA-backed Jeff Landry, I told Comrade Steve Millies that I wanted to write about "the Southern governors phenomenon." So many governors were leading attacks on the people at that time – Ronald DeSantis in Florida, Kay Ivey in Alabama, Greg Abbott in Texas. Steve told me to expose their rich backers, the corporations and banks that these politicians represent.

So I started looking into that, saying in an April 2024 email:

"Six far-right southern governors signed a joint letter condemning the Volkswagen unionization drive in Chattanooga. This exposes their interests completely and who they work for. All the 'anti-woke' nonsense is just a tool for beating back the multi-national, multi-gender and sexual-orientation working class."

What populism has to do with it

He also suggested that I read a 1973 pamphlet called "Southern Populism & Black Labor," written by U.S. Marxist leader Vince Copeland. (That pamphlet is included in the present book.) Copeland's analysis turned out to be illuminating.

For one thing, Copeland explained the history behind the word "populism," which the media was using to describe these far-right governors. It was also calling Donald Trump, JD Vance, and Bernie Sanders populists. It turns out, the same thing was happening in 1972 during the presidential campaign. The media labeled as populists both the far-right, segregationist candidate and the liberal candidate presenting himself as a reformer. But Copeland showed how ahistorical this was.

Populism was a progressive – that is, left-wing – movement of the late 19th Century, having farmers as its base, both Black and white. The movement fought big business and the big banks, and generally insisted that workers of different races share common interests, and ought to work together.

This doesn't sound like any of the politicians called populists except for Bernie Sanders. However, unlike the case of Sanders, the populists in their heyday were an independent mass movement. They were a big coalition of labor and farm organizations, and founded a political party to challenge both the Republicans and Democrats. They were a real threat to the ruling class.

This radical tradition influenced subsequent politics in the Progressive era and the New Deal, but was largely forgotten by the 1950s. The conservative "consensus historians" of the post-war U.S., especially Richard Hofstadter, were wary of mass movements. They saw progressive mass movements like populism as dangerous mass enthusiasm bordering on psychosis. They conflated fascism and populism, even though fascists opposed the workers and struggles against racism!

In his 2020 book, The People, No: A Brief History of Anti-Populism, Thomas Frank presents evidence that the consensus historians used the language of the horrified ruling class during the 1890s and the 1930s to characterize populism. This is how populism came to mean any mass movement, right or left, as well as demagogic appeals to "the common man" typical of Mussolini, Hitler, and Donald Trump.

Recovering the history of struggle

Language changes, and many words take on expanded meanings over time. But those changes often have political dimensions. By dissociating the word populism from its original meaning, the history of that struggle is buried.

We are in a period where the struggle over historical memory is front and center. The neo-fascist movement is attacking libraries, trying to shut down Black studies departments, and even suppressing medical science. Powerful people in government are trying to suppress even basic discussions about the oppression that exists in this society. The climate is not totally unlike that of the post-Reconstruction period in the South, when the "lost cause" narrative of the valiant slave owners was imposed upon real history. It was then that statues of Confederate leaders went up all over the region.

So, in an era when we are told that there is no alternative to capitalism, or even the possibility of a liveable future for humanity, they are trying to take away our history. But our movements need to know. Learning from history makes our movements stronger and more capable of going on the offensive.

Comrade Lallan Schoenstein, who designed this book, said "Your book is about what's happening today." I think that's correct. This book is about strategizing for the current fight against the billionaire oligarchs like Elon Musk and the fascist movement they're backing in order to save the decaying capitalist system. This book is a call for a revolutionary socialist response – a communist response – to the situation.

To that end, we have compiled pieces by various authors that have been published by Struggle-La Lucha newspaper. Hopefully they can help us in the struggles ahead.

– **Gregory E. Williams**
Feb. 23, 2025, New Orleans

History of Populism

HOW TO LIFT THE BURDEN FROM LABOR

Populists saw their party as a tool for bringing relief to the laboring masses.

PART 1

Is J.D. Vance a populist?

Populists fought the ruling class

As soon as Donald Trump announced Ohio Senator J.D. Vance as his running mate in the 2024 presidential campaign, many in the media have rushed to call Vance a "populist," as they have also done with Trump himself. Here are a couple of such headlines: "J.D. Vance's Populist Pitch" *Time Magazine*; "Vance Honed Populist Views in the Senate, Auditioning for Trump" *New York Times*.

Others are more skeptical: "The Fakest Populism You Ever Saw" T*he Atlantic*; "J.D. Vance's Phony Populism Thrilled the RNC. The Rest of Us Shouldn't Be Fooled" *The Nation*.

So, which is it? Is millionaire Vance a populist or a fake populist? And, for that matter, what is populism?

Populism and monopoly capitalism

Historically, the populist movement in the U.S. was a progressive, left-wing movement. It was centered around the People's Party in the 1890s and had traction into the first few years of the 20th Century. It was biggest in the South and West, in areas thought to be intractably right-wing nowadays. Based among small farm owners, it was a movement that fought against the rising power of big corporations and banks.

According to Vladimir Lenin's 1916 analysis in "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism," this was the period when capitalism went from its "free competition" phase (characterized by competition among small and medium-sized capitalist enterprises) to one in which huge trusts, monopolies, and giant banks dominated the scene.

This was the era of the "titans of industry," such as John D. Rockefeller of Standard Oil and financial magnate J.P. Morgan. We are living in their wake. Think about how, today, so much of the economy and our lives are dominated

by a handful of corporations like Amazon, and banks like JPMorgan Chase. Gary Wilson stated in "War and Lenin in the 21st Century":

> "A handful of monopolies dominate the entire economy. The top 10 of the Fortune 500 – Walmart, Amazon, Exxon Mobil, Apple, UnitedHealth, CVS, Berkshire Hathaway, Alphabet, McKesson, Chevron – controlled an estimated 20% of the U.S. economy in 2023. This is up from 18% in 2022 and 16% in 2021. The increasing concentration of economic power in the hands of a few large companies has been going on for decades.
>
> "These monopolies have become the most powerful economic and political institutions. They control the main sources of raw materials, the main means of production, and the main means of communication. They dictate to the whole of society what to produce, how to produce it, and where to sell it."

Lenin called this phase of capitalism both monopoly capitalism and imperialism; the term imperialism, here, does include what is conventionally meant by this word because the rise of monopolies forces capitalist governments to conquer new lands and markets – through war if necessary – to secure the monopoly capitalists' profits.

Populism, then, was very much a movement of its time, when an alliance of small farm owners, shopkeepers, tenant farmers, and industrial workers could emerge and also take on the challenge posed by the rising monopoly class. They attempted to build a coalition between the industrial laborers of the Northeast and Midwest and the farmers of the South and West. This was a truly radical movement against the super-rich like Morgan and Rockefeller.

Unfortunately, the social basis of this coalition no longer exists. According to the USDA, in 2022, farm work represented only 1.2% of U.S. employment. In 1920, 30.2% of the population lived on farms. The age of the small farmer, as well as the small shopkeeper, is over. Nevertheless, there are vital lessons to learn from the era of populism. We can draw inspiration from the populists – and avoid certain pitfalls they faced – as we build today's movement against the rich and rising fascism.

Populists fought the bosses

Writing during the 1972 presidential election and the Democratic Party primary campaign between liberal Democrat George McGovern and arch-segregationist George Wallace, U.S. Marxist leader Vince Copeland wrote:

> "In their time, the Populists elected state legislators and governors, and in one Congressional session during the 1880s, with a total of about 350 members in the House, there were over 50 Representatives with generally Populist leanings. In the election of 1892, they elected some state governors, five U.S. Senators, and 10 Representatives directly and frightened the Wall Street rulers considerably thereby. …
>
> "The legendary Governor John P. Altgeld of Illinois, although not in the People's Party, was deeply committed to Populist principles. He refused to call Federal troops during the Pullman strike in Chicago (1894) and openly condemned President Grover Cleveland for doing so. It was he who defied every corporation in the country and sacrificed his political career by pardoning the survivors of the original May Day (1886) frameups – the so-called anarchists who fought so magnificently for the eight-hour day.
>
> "Governor Davis H. Waite of Colorado, who was a representative of the People's Party, sent that state's militia to protect striking miners at Cripple Creek in 1894 on perhaps the only such occasion in the history of the United States." – "Southern Populism & Black Labor"

Copeland was inspired to write about populism at that time because the press was calling both McGovern and Wallace populists. He argued that this was wrong for many different reasons. Neither of these politicians was willing or able to fight the ruling class, as did those who were elected to office on the backs of the populist movement. It is difficult to imagine McGovern and almost impossible to imagine Wallace calling in a state militia to protect striking workers! It is equally absurd to imagine Trump and Vance, or Harris and Biden, standing up for militant strikers.

Populism was anti-racist

One of the biggest contradictions in calling Wallace a populist is that the populist movement was anti-racist. When Wallace was inaugurated as governor of Alabama in 1963, he gave a speech saying, "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever," and he meant it. In September of that year, he sent the state police to the towns of Birmingham, Tuskegee, Huntsville, and Mobile to prevent public schools from opening after federal courts ordered Alabama schools to desegregate. The violence that ensued forced President Kennedy to exert federal control over the Alabama National Guard to open the schools.

Today's far-right governors like Florida's Ron DeSantis and Louisiana's Jeff Landry follow in Wallace's footsteps. Trump and Vance, who scapegoat immigrants and use anti-Black dog whistles (woke, DEI), do as well. Trump's rallies are modern-day Klan rallies.

The politics of Alabama during the populist period were rather different. Copeland writes:

> "On June 24, 1880, a large delegation of white workers and white farmers met in Montgomery, Alabama, at the state's Greenback Labor Party Convention and took a position firmly opposed to school segregation (74 years before the Supreme Court's 'historic' decision!). …
>
> "And at the height of Populism, in the same city of Montgomery, when the Alabama People's Party held its convention there in 1892 just before getting 46% of the statewide vote, the new party platform declared:

"'We favor the protection of the colored race in their legal rights and should afford them encouragement and aid in the attainment of a higher civilization and citizenship, that through the means of kindness, fair treatment and just regard for them, a better understanding and more satisfactory condition may exist between the races.'"

There is no doubt that the anti-racist politics of the populist movement were progressive for their day, and even in our own time, when many of the gains of the Civil Rights and other movements have been reversed by the capitalist class' political onslaught. In the populist movement, it was widely understood that the pitting of Black and white workers against each other benefitted bosses, not workers.

Unfortunately, the populist movement was ultimately unable to build a coalition solidly linking Black and white workers, especially with Black tenant farmers, who organized with the Communist Party in Southern states in the 1930s. The populist movement remained a largely white movement, and this was a tremendous weakness.

Had they solved this problem, their power might have been far greater. They could have become a much more serious threat to both Wall Street and the racist ruling class that had reasserted itself in the South through the Klan-led terrorism that overturned Reconstruction. This mass terrorism of the planters and their supporters was, not incidentally, a forerunner of fascism – fascism avant la lettre.

PART 2

J.D. Vance, which side are you on

Populism or fascism?

Between 1922 and 1945, fascist movements came to power in various European countries, either through "home-grown" takeovers, as in Italy and Germany, or through military force, as when Nazi Germany occupied France. Like populists in earlier decades, fascists also denounced elites and railed against big business, but these resemblances are superficial.

By the time fascism arose, capitalism had fully morphed into its monopoly-imperialist phase. An independent, oppositional, petty bourgeois politics (of small farm owners and shopkeepers allied with the working class) was no longer possible. Fascism did rely on creating a mass base of the petty bourgeoisie and some sections of workers, notably along racist lines. But this was precisely to defend monopoly capitalism, not to fight it.

Fascism is not simply authoritarianism. It is a particular response of the capitalist class and the state when faced with a deep crisis of the capitalist system, as happened with the First World War and then the Great Depression beginning in 1929.

Agreeing with the whole tradition of bourgeois economics on this point, Lenin concluded in "State and Revolution" that "a democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism, and, therefore, once capital has gained possession of this very best shell … it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic can shake it."

This "democratic republic" is one in which the capitalists are dominant and everyone else is subjugated, but the smooth functioning of parliaments, of the rule of law, and with some buy-in from the masses is, on the whole, conducive to capital accumulation. The democratic republic can ensure stability for the capitalists. Lenin was perfectly aware of the limitations of this bourgeois or capitalist democracy, which rested upon slavery, colonial genocide, and sacrificing millions of wage workers to the sweatshops and coal

mines. But this bourgeois democracy is democratic precisely in relation to the anti-democratic fascist alternative (and to feudalism and monarchy in an earlier epoch).

When the system is imperiled, the capitalists are fully prepared to throw off this democratic shell in order to save the system, as is apparent with the far-right lurch of J.D. Vance's beloved Silicon Valley, which was once heralded as the promised land of enlightened, liberal capitalism.

Like the big banks and industrialists who bankrolled Hitler, Elon Musk officially endorsed Trump. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Musk planned to donate $45 million per month to a pro-Trump super PAC, which would total $180 million over the course of the election cycle. PayPal co-founder Peter Thiel gave the Trump campaign $1.25 million in 2016. Vance has called Thiel a mentor. *Forbes* described Thiel as "a massive difference-maker for Vance's 2022 Senate run." He gave Vance $15 million for his senatorial campaign.

Musk's support for Trump has paid off following Trump's election. Trump – who inherited his wealth from his father, Fred Trump, a New York City real estate gangster – has tasked Musk with overseeing sweeping budget cuts and attacks on public sector workers. Musk isn't the only one being rewarded. The billionaires' presidential campaign has produced a billionaires' presidential cabinet. As of Dec. 10, 2024, the total net worth of the billionaires in the Trump administration equals at least $382.2 billion – which is more than the GDP of 172 different countries.

Fascism is anti-communism

But fascism did not emerge simply as a way of managing the capitalist state in times of economic turmoil. It emerged as a way for the capitalists to fight back against the working-class movement and even socialist revolution.

The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia established the first workers' state after the brief but significant Paris Commune of March 18 to May 28, 1871. The Bolshevik Revolution ushered in a new age, putting socialist revolution on the agenda all over the world and setting the stage for the anti-colonial movements that would sweep Asia, Africa, and Latin America after World War II.

Germany and Italy – the countries that later became the epicenters of fascism – experienced revolutionary situations. Socialists almost came to power in both countries. The same was true of Hungary, where revolution-

aries came to power in 1919. The Hungarian Soviet Republic lasted for 133 days. During World War II, the country was taken over by a Nazi-backed puppet government. Fascism represented the revenge of the capitalists and aristocrats against the workers and peasant farmers.

Fascism not only plagued Europe. With its powerful military and industrialization policies, Japan joined the Western imperialists in the early 20th Century, bolstered by a fascist movement centered around the emperor, nationalism, and a belief in racial superiority. Japan violently colonized parts of China, Korea, and the Philippines and occupied almost all of Southeast Asia's land area and population centers during World War II.

This classical period of fascism was not the end of the story. When the U.S. became the dominant capitalist power after the war, Washington repeatedly used the fascist toolkit to crush people's movements throughout the Global South. Barely had the war ended, and Washington was overthrowing popular, and even socialist-leaning, governments: Iran in 1953; Guatemala in 1954. They carried out a bloodbath in Indonesia, where 2 million people had been members of the Communist Party during the 1955 elections. Between 1965 and 1966, U.S.-backed forces killed at least 500,000 in that country, with some estimates putting the figure as high as 2 million.

All of these atrocities were committed to protect monopoly profits, like those of the United Fruit Company in Guatemala and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in the case of Iran. Anglo-Persian was the forerunner of BP, which devastated the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Vance and the return of fascism

After the preceding, my conclusion should come as no surprise. J.D. Vance's politics are classically fascist, not populist. Like Trump, he is part of the return of fascism in contemporary capitalism, an outgrowth of today's profound crises.

Whereas the populists fought to unite workers and all the "little people" across racial divides, fascism has always been emphatically racist and aimed at division.

Vance echoes Trump on immigration. In his first campaign advertisement in 2022, when running for Senate in Ohio, he said, "Joe Biden's open border is killing Ohioans. With more illegal drugs and more Democrat voters pour-

ing into this country." Never mind that Biden is no friend of immigrants; he served under "deporter in chief," Barack Obama, and signed an executive order in June massively tightening the border with Mexico.

The point is to sow division. Vance advocates finishing the border wall. His racist scapegoating of immigrants is fascist, not populist.

Melinda Butterfield, an organizer of the **National March to Protect Trans Youth** in Orlando, Florida on Oct. 7, 2023 said:

> "Vance notably was the primary sponsor of a Senate bill to bar all trans care for trans youth nationwide. His bill would also bar secondary educational institutions, including medical schools, from teaching gender-affirming care for any age. Trump himself has called for investigations of hormone therapy manufacturers, bans on LGBTQ+ inclusive policies in schools, and targeting transgender people 'at any age.'"

Such attacks on trans people are part of the stock-in-trade of the right wing. They demonize oppressed, vulnerable groups to divide up the working class, preventing us from recognizing our real enemy: the capitalists.

Like historical fascists, Vance wants to limit women's freedom. He pressured regulators to let police access the records of people who cross state lines for abortions. All his politics around "the family" are geared towards pushing women out of the public sphere and back into the home. The Nazis did the same.

While Vance has criticized Biden for voting for the invasion of Iraq (which was a bipartisan effort), Vance emphatically stands behind Israel's genocide in Gaza. He talks about winding down funding for Ukraine, but that is only because he wants to shift the focus to military aggression against China.

He is not anti-war. He is a far cry from the populists who organized the American Anti-Imperialist League in 1898, opposing U.S. annexation of the Philippines. Mark Twain was a member.

Like the musician Oliver Anthony, Vance blames the poor for their poverty. This is the main thrust of his 2016 book "Hillbilly Elegy." Populists of the 1890s would have run him out of their convention halls for saying such things, clearly seeing through his Appalachian gimmick. He is on the side of the bosses, which is why he denies climate change and champions the mega oil and gas companies. (talk about underdogs!)

If we want inspiration from current-day Appalachia, we need look no further than the 2019 coal miners' protest in Harlan County, Kentucky. When Blackjewel Coal company declared bankruptcy and refused to give miners their paychecks, many of them camped out, blocking the train tracks so the coal could not be moved. This protest went on from July 29 to Sept. 26, with activists from around the region and beyond joining them in solidarity. (Harlan County was also the site of the 1931 "Harlan County War," a hard struggle between coal miners and bosses, which inspired the song "Which Side are You On?" by Florence Reece, a union organizer from Tennessee.)

In the 2019 struggle, transgender activists played a key role in running the camp. Thus cisgender, white, working-class men stood firmly with these trans activists and activists of color, showing that the white working class of Appalachia is not a monolith as Vance's stereotyping would suggest, nor is Appalachia all white. And just as importantly, this shows how people change and grow over the course of struggle. It may well be that some miners were unaccustomed to trans people, but that changed over those two months. That is the power of solidarity.

Because of that struggle, the miners were awarded $5.47 million. In January 2020, another group of miners blocked coal trains in Pike County, Kentucky. They eventually got paid, too.

Vance does not represent people like that. He represents the millionaires and billionaires in Silicon Valley, where he made his fortune. The Yale law school graduate is said to be worth $10 million. He and his wife were able to buy a home in Cincinnati for $1.4 million and then another in Alexandria, Virginia, for $1.6 million while millions in this country are homeless. No wonder he plans to let the AI tycoons and cryptocurrency scammers run rampant through the economy. Some venture capitalists stand to get rich from all this, but the wealth won't be trickling down. Has it ever? Workers in Appalachia and the Rust Belt need Vance like they need a hole in the head. We know which side he is on.

Down with Vance, down with Trump! Up with Appalachia, up with the working class!

PART 3

Resistance amid Jim Crow terror

As explained above, historical populism in the U.S. was a progressive, left-wing movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was a reaction to the rising monopoly capitalist class, the titans of big business, and big banks who were rapidly taking over the world. The movement was based especially among farmers in the South and West but included alliances with industrial workers and even small shopkeepers.

Although populism was overwhelmingly anti-racist, a fundamental weakness of the movement was that it remained mostly white. The populist movement was not able to create the big, multiracial alliance that was needed to take on the rich successfully.

But to leave the story at that would be misleading. In fact, there was a significant Black populist movement that had its own dynamics. What they achieved was impressive, especially considering the extreme racist violence that characterized this period.

When the populist movement was in full swing in the 1890s, the Southern ruling class' shock troops were carrying out over 100 lynchings annually, rolling back the many political, economic, and social gains made by Black people after the Civil War.

The Black populists organized and fought back during the height of this post-Reconstruction Klan terror, leaving a legacy that influenced movements going forward.

Roots of populism

Discussing the Black populists requires us to account for the origins of populism in general. The first section of this chapter began right in the middle of things, describing populism at its height in the 1890s, centered around the People's Party. But that party came out of a big wave of agrarian movements in the 1870s and 1880s. Mirroring the growth of industrial unions in the same period, farm workers and farm owners organized alliances. These alliances were the basis of the People's Party and, thus, of populism.

Colored Farmers National Alliance members, circa 1886.
Texas State Historical Association

Multiple factors drove these agricultural communities to organize. As capitalism entered its monopoly-imperialist phase, those making their living in agriculture were affected in specific ways, notably by being burdened with debt.

With the crop-lien system introduced in the South after the Civil War, sharecroppers and the even poorer tenant farmers were trapped in endless cycles of debt to rich landowners, making them indentured servants. Both rural white and Black workers were trapped in these cycles, with Black workers experiencing some of the worst exploitation.

In addition, the banks, which increasingly controlled the economy, dictated that farmers in the South grow cotton, the cash crop. Through repeated cycles of overproduction (growing more cotton than the market could absorb), cotton prices tended to fall, so those working the fields got less and less for their work. On the other hand, big capitalist players like cotton warehouse owners, banks, and shippers continued to profit. This bred righteous class anger.

Agricultural crisis struck the Midwest and the Plains in the 1880s. Masses of people had moved West in the preceding years, lured deliberately by the

railroad companies that were making a fortune. Railroad bosses wanted settlers in the new economic outposts. The federal government was providing these privately owned railroad companies with subsidies and giving them public land for the tracks – land that had been stolen from Indigenous peoples.

It was in 1886 that some 200,000 workers participated in the Great Southwest railroad strike, taking on the likes of robber baron Jay Gould, the owner of the Union Pacific rail company. These striking workers were not agricultural laborers, but the fact that this strike occurred at the same time that farmers were forming their alliances, and directing their ire against the rail companies, is hardly incidental.

The Knights of Labor, the biggest labor union federation in the country at the time, organized the strike. The agricultural alliances endorsed it. This support for the labor movement's goals was not a one-off. The Farmers' Alliance championed the eight-hour workday and called for public ownership of the railroads, which had been paid for by the people anyway.

In 1887, severe drought came to the West. Crops failed and inflated land prices fell, breaking the speculative bubble. The settlers who had moved to states like Kansas and Oklahoma were left high and dry as the Wall Street investors pulled out.

These are just some of the immediate factors that drove the establishment of the great agricultural alliances.

The Colored Alliance

One of the primary organizations of the movement was the Colored Farmers' National Alliance and Co-Operative Union (hereafter the Colored Farmers' Alliance). It was founded on Dec. 11, 1886, in Houston County, Texas, by 16 delegates identified as either "Negro" or "mulatto," plus one white farmer.

According to historian Omar H. Ali:

> "Hundreds of grassroots organizers tapped into preexisting networks of Black farmers, sharecroppers, and agrarian workers affiliated with Black churches, the Colored Agricultural Wheels, the Knights of Labor, the Cooperative Workers of America, and the Colored Farmers' Union. Within two years of its founding, the Colored Alliance consolidated various Black agrarian organizations scattered across the South into a cohesive movement encompassing hundreds of thousands of African Americans."
> ("In the Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900")

Around the same time in Texas, a different organization called the National Colored Alliance formed. Within three years, the group claimed a membership of 250,000. There were chapters in every Southern state. The two alliances merged into a single organization: The Colored Alliance.

The Colored Alliance carried out mutual aid and self-help activities, raising funds to help members in a society almost completely lacking a social safety net, especially for rural Black farmers and sharecroppers. They planned and carried out cooperative farming activities, and conducted educational presentations on farm techniques and more. The Alliance also published multiple newspapers.

Any organization of Black people was suspect, whether overtly "political" or not; the Colored Alliance, therefore, operated in the beginning as a largely clandestine organization – modeled on secret societies like the Freemasons – and centered in Black churches.

However, the Alliance also engaged in more militant struggles, coming into direct confrontation with the racist white ruling class by "boycotting goods where price gouging was taking place, demanding higher wages for cotton picking, and calling for an immediate end to the convict-lease system," in the words of Ali. He goes on to explain:

> "The convict-lease system was both a means of control and a particularly cruel profit-making business in the South. It gave planters, railroad bosses, and other employers who faced labor shortages, free rein to purchase labor from the state (at a small fine and court cost). The labor often came from those convicted of petty crimes and disproportionately marked Black men, many of whom were physically and mentally abused in a system with little legal recourse; county officials notoriously looked the other way to abuses of authority, even when deaths were the result. The Colored Alliance's opposition to the system therefore targeted a critical point of contention for African Americans."

Ali argues for the importance of assessing Black populism on its own terms. It was not simply an appendage of a general – or, more accurately, majority white – movement. Rather, it developed from the internal dynamics of the Black community, including other political and labor organizations of the time, as well as fraternal and religious groups. As a counter to the rising tide of Jim Crow, Black populism made unique contributions and left a legacy that reverberated through the radical sharecroppers' movement of the 1930s, the Civil Rights, and Black Power struggles down to the present day.

Movement segregation

From their inception, Black populist organizations like the Colored Alliance were not the driving force of a segregated movement. On the contrary, it was existing segregation in white farmers' organizations that, at least in part, necessitated the establishment of the Colored Alliance.

The biggest agrarian organization was the Farmers' Alliance, founded in central Texas in 1876. Later, it became the backbone of the People's Party. The Farmers' Alliance denied membership to Black people, six years before the Colored Alliance was founded. This was in keeping with the political trend of post-Reconstruction reaction. Such white chauvinism was a boon to the ruling class and a detriment to sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and poor farm owners, both Black and white.

Despite the organizational segregation, the Black and white Alliances joined forces on multiple campaigns. These included opposing the privately owned Louisiana State Lottery Company and tax hikes on cottonseed oil, which was an important source of income for Black tenant farmers.

There were class contradictions at play here, however. This agrarian movement had made strange bedfellows, with some of the poorest people, like sharecroppers, in an alliance with wealthy farm owners. The white Farmers' Alliance, especially, included big landowners who employed sharecroppers. For these wealthy farmers, opposition to the inclusion of Black members was not just racism in the abstract. It had implications for their bottom line.

Crucially, a split occurred over voting rights. In 1890, a Republican member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Henry Cabot Lodge, introduced the Federal Elections Bill, which aimed to curb voter suppression in the South by establishing federal oversight. At that time, the Democratic Party was the party of segregation and the whole political apparatus of the South conspired to disenfranchise Republican – especially Black – voters. The bill was endorsed by Republican President Benjamin Harrison. The white Farmers' Alliance opposed the bill, siding with racist Southern Democrats who made it the main presidential election issue in the South in 1892.

Cotton-pickers strike

The Colored Alliance called for a general strike of Black cotton pickers in 1891, demanding higher pay. These laborers were only getting 50 cents

for 100 pounds of cotton. Strike organizers called for a raise to $1 per 100 pounds. As with the voter bill, the white Farmers Alliance balked at the demands and opposed the strike.

The Georgia chapter of the Colored Alliance included wealthier Black farmers who employed sharecroppers themselves, and this chapter also opposed the strike.

The planned September strike did not break out anywhere except for Lee County, Arkansas. A Black labor organizer from Memphis, Tennessee, Ben Patterson, went there and recruited around 25 pickers to strike.

Workers began striking on a farm owned by Colonel H.P. Rodgers. Unfortunately, the strike did not spread across the county, and these strikers remained isolated. The sheriff organized a posse and chased the strikers to an island near Horseshoe Lake on Sept. 29. Patterson escaped but was recaptured and shot. The sheriff allowed masked lynchers to murder the nine prisoners taken by his posse.

We can learn a great deal from the bravery of these strikers. Their fate is also emblematic of the extreme, terroristic violence of the racist planter class and its lackeys. This kind of repression was endemic and has to be taken into consideration when assessing Black populism and the populist movement generally. This is what they were up against.

At the same time, we would be right to wonder how much more effective this strike call, and other efforts, might have been if the white Farmers' Alliance had thrown its weight behind it rather than caving to racist scare tactics and prioritizing the interests of its wealthier land-owning members. We can also wonder whether the situation might have been altered if the Georgia chapter of the Colored Alliance had not sown dissension on behalf of its wealthier members.

The Agricultural Wheel

There were other farmers' alliances that were integrated or quasi-integrated. One example is the Agricultural Wheel, a farmer's union founded in the Arkansas Delta in 1882. It expanded to 10 other states, mostly in the South, but even reached Wisconsin. In 1888, they joined forces with the Knights of Labor to form the Union Labor Party of Arkansas and ran candidates. At its peak in 1888, the Wheel had 75,000 members, making it a real force.

Early on, the Wheel dropped whiteness as a requirement for membership and began admitting Black members into separate Black Wheel formations. In 1887, an unrelated Black farmer's union, The Sons of the Agricultural Star, merged with The Wheel.

These concrete developments toward uniting rural Black and white people on a class basis were a real advance. This progress on race – or "the national question," as Lenin called it – came undone in 1889 when the Wheel merged with an organization called the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union of America. One of the terms of the agreement was the denial of membership to Black farmers. This meant excluding half of all Southern farmers, who were Black. ("The Encyclopedia of Arkansas")

The Wilmington Massacre

This essay has dealt mainly with the pre-history of populism prior to the founding of the People's Party in 1892. In those years, the Agricultural Alliance attempted to work with both of the two ruling parties, that is, with the Democrats in the South and the Republicans in the North, with limited success. These failures, in part, inspired the formation of the People's Party. The Party was not simply a reformulation of the Alliance but involved some fusion with the industrial workers' movement, namely the Knights of Labor. The new party drew from the ranks of both organizations.

If we fast forward to 1898 – a year representing the height and culmination of populism – the tremendous significance of the Black movement within populism becomes apparent.

In Wilmington, North Carolina, Black populists made a major stand against the rising tide of Jim Crow. This majority-Black Southern city was the largest in the state and had a biracial government, with Black citizens serving as aldermen, coroners, and more. This was not the case everywhere in the state, and the openly white supremacist Democratic Party that had retaken the state legislature with the overthrow of Reconstruction attempted to curtail home rule in the towns; they had their sights on Wilmington.

The government in Wilmington was "fusionist," meaning that it resulted from an alliance between the Republican Party, on the one hand, and the Populist or People's Party, on the other. The Wilmington Republican Party itself was biracial.

Statewide, the Populist and Republican Parties formed a fusion coalition from 1894 to 1900. They combatted the Democrats and championed progressive policies such as equal voting rights and free public education. (Both voting rights and public education are under attack in 2024).

In addition to Black people holding power in the city government, many were successful in local trade and business. They made up some 30% of the skilled trade workforce.

Most of the progress in Wilmington came to a halt in 1898 when white supremacist mobs carried out a sustained campaign of violence.

On Nov. 10, 1898 a white supremacy mob burned down the Black-owned Daily Record in Wilmington, N.C. under the leadship of a former Confederate Colonel.

It is clear that this was not a spontaneous eruption. Rather, the Democratic Party – particularly a Wilmington grouping known as "the Secret Nine" – plotted a coup to drive Black people out of political life and better-paying jobs.

Like Donald Trump, these ruling-class leaders used the press and rallies to foment racist hysteria, affecting enough of the white population that around 2,000 went on to participate in the massacre. They relied on old lies about Black men sexually assaulting white women, while also tapping into economic and other anxieties – not so different from today's anti-trans and anti-immigrant panic.

This was not a totally disorganized mob, though. The Red Shirts were a terrorist organization similar to the Ku Klux Klan in Wilmington, and they led much of the violence. These paramilitary organizations played a role similar to that of the Brown Shirts during Hitler's rise to power in Germany.

This basic logic of fascism is apparent here. In an attempt to preserve its rule and reverse gains won by the people, the ruling class terrorizes the population with violence. But then as now, people fought back. The next section will explore the Wilmington events in greater detail and specify their relation to Reconstruction.

PART 4

From Cuba to Louisiana
Two paths after slavery's end

Earlier, I argued that the populist movement of the late 19th Century was an advance for the progressive forces in U.S. society, given both the violent, counterrevolutionary overturn of Reconstruction as well as the ongoing consolidation of power by the monopoly capitalist class. Populism was a stand against both of these trends.

It should also be noted that the populist movement was one instance in U.S. history when two-party domination of the political system was undermined. The populist People's Party effectively challenged the Republicans and Democrats. This was no small thing at the time. And now, this bit of history is significant in light of the 2024 U.S. presidential election between billionaire-backed candidates Kamala Harris and Donald Trump. Today, many despair at the increasingly obvious anti-democratic nature of the political system.

The circa 1898 government in Wilmington, North Carolina, was especially remarkable. It was a "fusion" government, that is, an alliance between the People's Party, on the one hand, and the Republican Party, on the other. At that time, the Republican Party was still the anti-slavery party. At the same time, the Democrats in the South represented the interests of the white ruling class against both Black and poor white people, with the latter making up the majority of the population. The Wilmington government comprised Black and white officeholders, bucking the post-Reconstruction trend.

The progress in Wilmington was undone by a wave of violence orchestrated by a clique of white racists on behalf of the rich. Prefiguring today's social media disinformation campaigns, they used the press to whip up racist hysteria with lies about Black men sexually assaulting white women. This should sound painfully familiar to us, as we have just witnessed the effects of Donald Trump and J.D. Vance's lies about Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, which led to a slew of bomb threats and school closures. And we have just seen Britain erupt into anti-immigrant violence, while the working classes of

both the U.S. and Britain are under severe economic strain, exacerbated daily by the political leadership.

The remainder of this article will attempt to specify what Reconstruction was since that has not been addressed previously, even though it is essential to this whole reassessment of populism. The next section will describe how the Wilmington racists orchestrated their propaganda machine to carry out a coup d'etat.

Reconstruction: one of the most democratic periods in the history of the country

W.E.B. Du Bois' 1935 "Black Reconstruction in America" was one of the first systematic works of history to refute the prevailing view – in both academic and the broader culture – that Reconstruction was an erroneous undertaking and a disaster. When Du Bois' book came out, many historians of the Civil War championed the "lost cause" narrative, which painted the Confederate cause as just. They argued that the war was caused by anything other than slavery.

Du Bois marshaled the Confederate leaders' own words against that argument, showing that the Confederacy was founded upon the principle of slavery and that the war was very much fought over it, even if the Washington government's aim at the start of the war was to preserve the union, not to abolish slavery. Moreover, Du Bois showed that Black people constituted the greatest factor in their own liberation. A practitioner of Marx's scientific historical method, Du Bois presented ample evidence for what he called the "general strike" of the enslaved. Masses of the enslaved left the plantations during the course of the war, withdrawing their labor and cutting the Confederate economy's legs out from under it.

Not only that. These masses of Black people who emancipated themselves went over to the Union side and fortified the Union Army with their labor in agriculture and skilled trades. They forced the government in Washington to commit to emancipation. And through their determination, they induced the government to arm them so they could fight.

According to an article on the U.S. National Archives website:

> "By the end of the Civil War, roughly 179,000 Black men (10% of the Union Army) served as soldiers in the U.S. Army and another 19,000 served in the Navy. Nearly 40,000 Black soldiers died over the course of the war – 30,000 of infection or disease."

Du Bois saw that the Black freedom struggle was a revolutionary labor struggle with global significance. So did Karl Marx. In Black Reconstruction, Du Bois included Marx's Jan. 28, 1865, letter to U.S. President Abraham Lincoln. Marx stated:

> "The working classes of Europe understood at once, even before the fanatic partisanship of the upper classes for the Confederate gentry had given its dismal warning, that the slaveholders' rebellion was to sound the tocsin [alarm] for a general holy crusade of property against labor, and that for the men of labor, with their hopes for the future, even their past conquests were at stake in that tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic."

The Freedmen's Bureau

Various experiments in Black self-governance and cooperative economic activity were carried out during the war. These anticipated aspects of Reconstruction, including the formation of the federal Freedmen's Bureau at the end of the war in 1865. Du Bois said of the Bureau:

> "In the Freedmen's Bureau, the United States started upon a dictatorship by which the landowner and the capitalist were to be openly and deliberately curbed and which directed its efforts in the interest of a Black and white labor class. If and when universal suffrage came to reinforce this point of view, an entirely different development of American industry and American civilization must ensue. The Freedmen's Bureau was the most extraordinary and far-reaching institution of social uplift that America has ever attempted. It had to do, not simply with emancipated slaves and poor whites, but also with the property of Southern planters. It was a government guardianship for the relief and guidance of white and black labor from a feudal agrarianism to modern farming and industry. For this work there was and had to be a full-fledged government of men."

The Freedman's Bureau organized the economy in the devastated South. It built schools, including many of the historically Black colleges and universities that still exist. It helped poor white people for whom the rich planters had never shown the slightest concern.

Reconstruction was one of the most democratic periods in the history of the country. It brought the first public schools to the South. Before this time, only the children of the wealthy were educated. With Reconstruction, masses of poor white children were finally able to attend school, along with their Black counterparts. The formerly enslaved who had been forbidden to read and

write began learning by the thousands. Many schools were not segregated at this time. The Louisiana and South Carolina constitutions even prohibited it.

The extension of education to poor white Southerners demonstrates the universal character of the Black freedom struggle. This labor struggle – as both Marx and Du Bois understood it – necessitated the uplift of all the oppressed and laboring masses. In "Capital Volume 1," Marx wrote:

> "In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralysed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. **Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the Black, it is branded**. But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours agitation, that ran with the seven-leagued boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California. The General Congress of Labor at Baltimore (Aug. 16, 1866) declared: 'The first and great necessity of the present, to free the labor of this country from capitalistic slavery, is the passing of a law by which eight hours shall be the normal working-day in all States of the American Union. We are resolved to put forth all our strength until this glorious result is attained.'"

During Reconstruction, suffrage was extended to Black men. (U.S. women of any race were not able to vote until the movement won that right in 1920, three years after the socialist Bolshevik Revolution gave women the right to vote throughout the old Russian empire.) Not only did Black men vote, but they also held office. Sixteen served in the U.S. Congress, and over 600 in state legislatures. Hundreds served in other offices.

A necessary military occupation

All of this was tremendous progress, which was ensured by the federal government's military occupation of the South, which lasted for 12 years. The last troops to leave the South withdrew from Louisiana on April 24, 1877, a date often cited as the end of Reconstruction. Proponents of the "lost cause" decry the occupation, but it is analogous to the Allied occupation of Germany after World War II.

To the East, the Soviet Red Army helped the people of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and several other countries build their own workers' states and begin the process of reversing the damage done by their Nazi-allied governments. The Soviet role in establishing the socialist German Democratic Republic is an especially apt comparison.

Germany – which had a long tradition of revolutionary working class-struggle and one of the most powerful communist movements in the world – had been decimated by Hitler's rule. He had beaten back the working class revolution. Under Hitler, Germany had murdered 6 million Jewish people along with other oppressed groups. But the post-war socialist government in Eastern Germany was aiding the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and supporting the liberation fighters in Vietnam. (The U.S. and capitalist West Germany supported apartheid, by the way. Washington branded Nelson Mandela a terrorist.)

With guaranteed housing, child care, health care, employment, and more, socialist East Germany was a beacon for the revolutionary peoples of the world. This is an incredible transformation in a very short period of time. Again, the transformation was backed up by the early occupation by the Red Army and later by the Warsaw Pact – the military alliance of the socialist camp in Europe. The Washington-led imperialists relentlessly plotted to overthrow these progressive workers' governments and used the offensive military alliance, NATO, to threaten them.

However, there are many big differences between what happened in the South after the Civil War and what occurred in Eastern Europe following WWII.

Land reform

About a century separated Reconstruction and these events in Eastern Europe and they were quite different periods. A major difference is that with the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, a new global era of socialist and national liberation struggles had been inaugurated. Starting in Russia, countries that had socialist revolutions carried out land reform. This involved breaking up the wealthy exploiters' big agricultural estates and dividing them among the peasants working the land. This was also true for the Eastern European countries after WWII.

Land reform destroyed the power of the old land-owning classes and empowered the peasants. This had also been the dream of the enslaved in the U.S. and should have been the foundation of Reconstruction. Land reform did not happen in any meaningful sense. It is not the case that nobody at the time understood this necessity. On the contrary, radical champions of Reconstruction democracy like U.S. Representative Thaddeus Stephens and

Freedmen's Bureau students in West Virginia.
Photo: West Virginia University Center for Women's Studies.

Senator Charles Sumner articulated the problem explicitly. They knew that having political rights was not enough. Black people needed their own economic resources, most especially land.

Nevertheless, as Vince Copeland says in "Southern Populism":

> "The revolutionary U.S. Freedmen's Bureau had distributed some 800,000 acres to ex-slaves during Reconstruction. But this was relatively very small. It would have come to less than one acre per Black family had it all been evenly divided. Furthermore, most of this land was taken back by the ex-slaveholders after the 1877 counterrevolution, some of it even before that time.
>
> "By 1880 there were over 6 million Black people in the South. According to Dr. Rayford W. Logan in his 'Betrayal of the Negro,' there were 120,738 Black-owned farms in the whole country, most of them in the South. There were three times as many Black tenant farmers, says Dr. Logan, as there were owners. Most of the tenant farms, too, were in the South. Few of the independent farms could trace their origin to any division of the land – least of all to the revolutionary expropriation of slaveholders' land that never really did take place."

The U.S. did not have the necessary revolutionary leadership, and thus, land reform was a limiting factor in the Reconstruction process. The fact that this did not occur meant that a new white economic elite could assemble itself in the South, and masses of Black people were subjected to new forms of hyper-exploitation in tenant farming and sharecropping. So, despite the extensive political transformations opened up in this era, the material, economic basis for the oppression of Black people remained in place, and the new Bourbon Southern elite – with their Klan terror – were able to overturn Reconstruction.

All of this is to emphasize that the Black populists (and, by extension, the whole populist movement, which depended on organizing across race lines) was in a disadvantaged position from the outset.

Here is more from Copeland:

> "The white Populists were land-hungry, especially in the West, where they saw the railroads and ranch-owners grabbing land a million or more acres at a time. But the Southern Black Populists needed land not only as a way of competing with big business and of growing prosperous. They needed it desperately in order to assert their human right to exist at all in the modern world – that is, in order not to sink into the same slavery that existed before the Civil War. This was only vaguely understood among the whites, who confined themselves to supporting the right of Blacks to vote and did not stir themselves to make an active alliance to help the Blacks get the land."

A sign reading 'La Habana de todos' or 'Havana for everyone' in downtown Havana, Cuba, in 2023. SLL photo: Gregory E. Williams.

A note on Cuba

The question of military occupation notwithstanding, perhaps Cuba is the workers' state whose experience is most apt to compare with the South. Like the U.S. South and Haiti, Cuba was part of a bigger Caribbean world dominated for centuries by plantation system slavery. Slave rebellions shook Cuba in the 1840s. One of the most famous insurrectionists was Carlota Lucumí, a Yoruba woman who led an uprising at the Triumvirato sugar mill. She is counted in the immortal ranks of revolutionaries like Haiti's Toussaint L'Ouverture and Charles Deslondes, who led a slave rebellion in south Louisiana in 1811, inspired by the Haitian Revolution. But, the "peculiar institution" of slavery was not abolished in Cuba until 1886, 21 years after the end of the U.S. Civil War.

Cuban revolutionaries won independence from Spain in 1898. With the Spanish out, Washington and Wall Street took over, turning the country into a sugar plantation neo-colony. Havana became a mob-run haven for foreign sex tourism.

Dictator Fulgencio Batista's Cuba of the 1950s was a nightmare for the great majority; he was Washington's hand-picked stooge. Countrywide, per capita income was half that of Mississippi, the poorest state in the U.S. The average Cuban was living on 312 pesos or $6 per week. Few rural areas had schools, and children often died early from infectious diseases. Most workers were employed on the huge farms and were out of work – suffering from malnutrition and other plights – during the off-season.

But between 1959 and 1963, Cuba's revolutionary socialist government carried out land reform, breaking the cycle of rural poverty. They did what the radical Reconstructionists dreamed of doing. So, even though Cuba has a very similar history of colonial genocide against the Indigenous people and enslavement of Africans, its social reality today is starkly different from the U.S. South. Cuba is as multinational as the U.S. but is infinitely further along on the road to racial equality and is not riven by economic inequality.

This author visited Havana as part of the U.S. Friends Against Homophobia and Transphobia delegation in May 2023. Being from south Louisiana, this author was struck by how much the old city looked like the New Orleans French Quarter. The architecture is similar – Spanish colonial. But there was one tremendous difference. The beautiful old houses were being used as homes. Colonial mansions were transformed into the headquarters of democratic mass organizations like the Federation of Cuban Women and the National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX). There were no homeless people.

New Orleans' French Quarter used to be residential, but today is an adult Disneyland. Very few people can afford to live there, and tourist shops and short-term rentals take up the historic buildings. Contrasting Cuba and the U.S. South – and U.S. society generally – shows what happens for the common people when the exploiting classes are expropriated vs. what happens when they are not.

The working-class unity that was needed

The Civil War involved a tremendous revolutionary upsurge of the Black masses. It wiped away the power of the planters and advanced many of the unfinished bourgeois revolutionary tasks that were not on the agenda in 1776. But, the crucial economic task of land reform was blocked by a lack of political will. This great labor struggle of the Black masses posed the question of a

broader revolution of the laboring classes against not only the retrogressive Southern planters but also Northern industry and finance.

This is perhaps a characteristic feature of revolutionary processes: They carry the seeds of their own overcoming within them. The bourgeois French Revolution necessarily relied upon the laboring masses whose interests did not perfectly coincide with the rising middle class (the bourgeoisie or capitalists) against the aristocracy. It thus posed the question of a laborers' revolution. This was realized some 70 years later with the Paris Commune of 1871 when the workers of Paris established the first workers' state, which lasted for two months. The second workers' state, the Soviet Union, lasted about 70 years. The workers' states of China, Cuba, Vietnam, Laos, and the DPRK are still standing.

There was a possibility inherent in the post-Civil War situation for freed Black labor, poor Southern white people, and Northern industrial laborers to form a solid bloc. This was the potential, general power of labor made possible by the Black freedom struggle. They could have made common cause with the Indigenous people, too; the U.S. government was carrying out genocide against them before, during, and after the war.

The entrenched nature of racial prejudice (stoked by the rich and their propagandists in the press), the lack of land reform, and other factors kept working-class and oppressed unity from fully developing. The defeat of Reconstruction in 1877 and the unleashing of Klan terror turned the clock back – not just for Black people but for the whole working class and all the oppressed. This meant the industrial capitalists could consolidate power, now unencumbered by the backward slave system. Just a few years later, the populist movement would come to challenge this capitalist dictatorship under the hard conditions of Jim Crow.

A Cuban perspective on race and revolution

While preparing the preceding section, I spoke with a young Cuban woman of African descent. We met her during our U.S. Friends Against Homophobia and Transphobia delegation to Havana in 2023. Here, she is identified as "**R**" for "respondent."

Gregory E. Williams: My article concerns the legacy of the Civil War in the United States. Both Cuba and the U.S. abolished slavery after a long struggle.

But the reality in the two countries is quite different today because of the two different social systems: capitalism in the U.S. and socialism in Cuba.

Cuba doesn't have racist housing discrimination or police murdering hundreds of Black people every year like in the U.S. So I am comparing that in one section of the article.

What do you think about the progress Cuba has made regarding equality of people of African descent since 1959? Does Cuba have racism in any way comparable to the United States?

R: In Cuba, the triumph of the Revolution in 1959 brought radical changes to the lives of people of African descent. But, although the progress is unquestionable, manifestations of racial discrimination still persist since it is not so easy to reverse centuries of racist and discriminatory attitudes in 65 years.

In 2019, the National Program Against Racism and Racial Discrimination was created as a strategy at the highest management level to provide a definitive solution to these issues.

However, it is important to mention that the signs of discrimination based on skin color, which may still be present in Cuban society, are not at all comparable to the situation in the United States. All Cubans equally enjoy the same rights and access to opportunities under the legal protection of the Constitution of the Republic.

GEW: Thank you for that explanation. It gives a good context for people to understand. Of course, racism is a continuing problem because of the centuries of racist colonial oppression, as you say. But, Cuba is proactive and making new advances, not just resting on the old achievements of the revolution.

This is one thing I really respect about the Cuban revolutionary approach. As with gender and sexual rights – areas where Cuba is advancing – it is a question of how to move forward. By contrast, with the capitalist class's attacks in the U.S., we are moving backward.

En Español

Al preparar la cuarta parte de esta serie sobre la historia del movimiento populista, incluí una sección que compara las trayectorias marcadamente diferentes de Cuba y EEUU después de la esclavitud. Mientras preparaba ese material, hablé con una joven cubana de ascendencia africana. La conocimos durante nuestra delegación de Amigos de Estados Unidos contra la Homo-

fobia y la Transfobia a La Habana en 2023. Aquí, se la identifica como "R" de "encuestado" o "respondent" en inglés.

GEW: Mi artículo trata sobre el legado de la Guerra Civil en los Estados Unidos. Tanto Cuba como Estados Unidos abolieron la esclavitud después de una larga lucha. Pero la realidad en los dos países es bastante diferente hoy debido a los dos sistemas sociales diferentes: el capitalismo en Estados Unidos y el socialismo en Cuba.

Cuba no tiene discriminación racista en materia de vivienda ni policías que asesinan a cientos de afrodescendientes cada año como en Estados Unidos. Así que estoy comparando eso en una sección del artículo.

¿Qué opinas sobre los avances que ha logrado Cuba en materia de igualdad de los afrodescendientes desde 1959? ¿Cuba tiene un racismo comparable al de Estados Unidos?

R: En Cuba, el triunfo de la Revolución en 1959, trajo consigo cambios radicales para la vida de los afrodescendientes. Pero, si bien los avances son incuestionables, aún persisten manifestaciones de discriminación racial, pues no es tan fácil revertir en 65 años siglos de actitudes racistas y discriminatorias.

En 2019 fue creado el Programa Nacional contra el Racismo y la Discriminación Racial como una estrategia, al más alto nivel de dirección, para dar solución definitiva a estos temas.

No obstante, resulta importante mencionar que las muestras de discriminación por color de la piel, que puedan aún estar presentes en la sociedad cubana, para nada son comparables con la situación en EEUU. Todos los cubanos, disfrutan por igual, de los mismos derechos y acceso a oportunidades bajo el amparo legal de la Constitución de la República.

GEW: Gracias por esa explicación. Esto proporciona un buen contexto para que la gente lo entienda. Por supuesto, el racismo es un problema continuo debido a los siglos de opresión colonial racista, como usted dice. Pero Cuba es proactiva y logra nuevos avances, y no se basa simplemente en viejos logros de la revolución.

Esto es algo que realmente respeto del enfoque revolucionario cubano. Al igual que con los derechos del género y la sexualidad – áreas en las que Cuba está avanzando – es una cuestión de cómo avanzar. En cambio, con los ataques de la clase capitalista en Estados Unidos, estamos retrocediendo.

How the wealthy engineered white supremacy

The Wilmington Massacre of 1898

The Wilmington, North Carolina, massacre of 1898, also called a coup, was not a spontaneous eruption of white supremacist violence, but instead came from the top leadership of the Democratic Party and was backed by the rich. The purpose was to drive Black people out of public life and ensure minority rule by wealthy white businessmen. How did they pull this off? Manipulation of the mass media was a principal factor, along with setting up pseudo-grassroots organizations throughout the state.

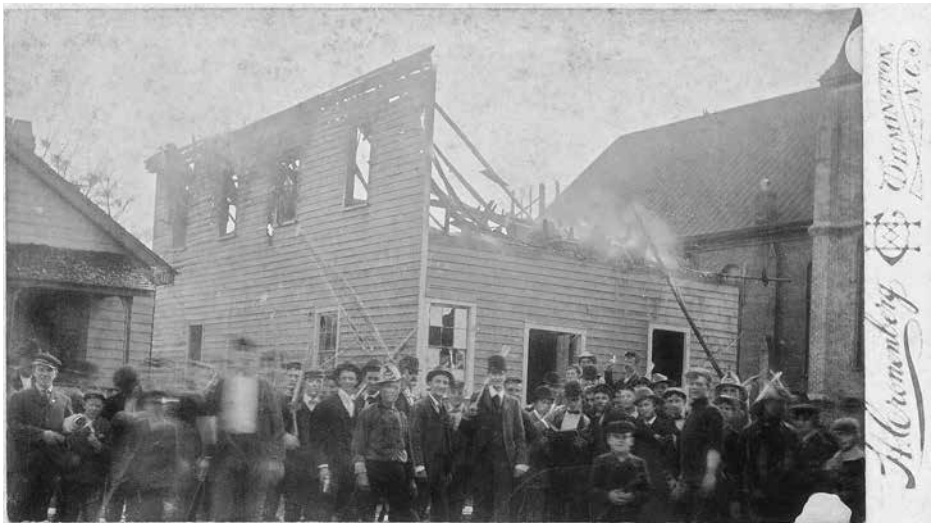
The road to 1898 began some 28 years earlier when the Democrats retook control of the state legislature in 1870. Over this long period, they whittled away at the gains of Reconstruction in North Carolina. Despite that, both the Republicans and the People's Party continued to challenge the openly racist Democratic Party throughout the period.

As Thomas Frank put it, "This was the state where Populism – in 'fusion' with the local Republican Party – actually captured the government in 1894 and '96 and then made reforms that allowed Black [people] to sometimes gain political power in places where they were in the majority." ("The People, No: A Brief History of Anti-Populism")

The fusion movement won all the statewide races in 1894 and 1896, in fact. This was a significant challenge to the moneyed elites. And despite the national turn (the reactionary Supreme Court enacted the apartheid "separate but equal" doctrine in 1896 in the Plessy v. Ferguson ruling) the city of Wilmington was one place where Black people continued to hold public office, and it was also governed by a Populist-Republican fusion coalition.

The White Supremacy Campaign

In 1898, North Carolina's seats in both the U.S. House and Senate were up for grabs, with urban Wilmington being important in these elections, giving the events a national significance. The new Democratic state party chair was Furnifold McLendel Simmons. He was born on his father's plantation in 1854 and lived until 1940, even chairing the U.S. Senate Finance Committee during WWI. In 1897, Simmons was tasked with developing a strategy for the



On Nov. 10, 1898 a mob of 2,000 burned down the Black-owned Daily Record at the instruction of former Confederate Colonel Alfred Waddell. White Supremacy campaign leaders provided the white mobs with food, liquor and a machine gun, the Gatling gun, to use against unarmed Black people.
Photo: N.C. Archives and History

Democrats to secure power in North Carolina, and that strategy was bluntly named the White Supremacy Campaign.

The idea was this: If they could make anti-Blackness the number one political issue, crowding everything else out, then they could defeat any Republican and People's Party challengers. On top of that, real-world violence (as well as the threat of violence) could effectively prevent masses of Black voters from going to the polls.

In practice, the strategy worked just as planned. But as Timothy B. Tyson put it, "A propaganda campaign slandering African-Americans would not come cheap. Simmons made secret deals with railroads, banks and industrialists. In exchange for donations right away, the Democrats pledged to slash corporate taxes after their victory." – "The Ghosts of 1898: Wilmington's Race Riot and the Rise of White Supremacy."

Sound familiar? The White Supremacy Campaign was backed by the rich and carried out on their behalf, just like today's movements targeting immigrants, LGBTQ+, and other oppressed people.

Racist media manipulation and phony grassroots organizations

Tyson continues:

> "At the center of their strategy lay the gifts and assets of [Josephus] Daniels, editor and publisher of *The News and Observer* [newspaper]. He spearheaded a propaganda effort that made white partisans angry enough to commit electoral fraud and mass murder. It would not be merely a campaign of heated rhetoric but also one of violence and intimidation. Daniels called Simmons 'a genius in putting everybody to work – men who could write, men who could speak, and men who could ride – the last by no means the least important.' By 'ride,' Daniels employed a euphemism for vigilante terror. Black North Carolinians had to be kept away from the polls by any means necessary."

In the statewide press, Daniels harped on the horror of Wilmington, the center of "Negro domination" in the state. (Never mind that the state legislature was 2/3rds white.) This is very similar to the politics in contemporary Louisiana, where Governor Jeff Landry whips up fear about violent crime centered in majority-Black metro New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

Simmons tapped the talented young cartoonist Norman Jennett to crystalize the campaign's message into memorable images. His caricatures were like the racist memes of that era, and the antithesis of the iconic class-conscious labor cartoons of the period. They were designed to produce an immediate, visceral reaction.

The campaign's leaders went so far as to establish white supremacist clubs across the state, creating the impression of a popular groundswell. This top-down method for generating reactionary outrage has had a long life mirrored in today's well-funded, fake grassroots organizations like Moms for Liberty and "school choice" outfits. These types of groups successfully get media coverage, presenting themselves as concerned parents who happened to come together over a common cause when really they are funded by the billionaire Koch brothers or the Walmart heirs.

Perhaps even more outrageous, the North Carolina racists set up a phony White Labor Union backed by the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce and the Merchant's Association. Through this organization, they could divert some white workers from their real grievances against the bosses and focus their

anxiety onto competition with Black workers, uniting them in a campaign to keep Black workers out of the more desirable jobs – and elected offices.

As we have seen previously, this kind of deceptive appeal to the working class became a hallmark of fascism in the 20th Century. It aimed to draw workers away from the real organizations that fought for their interests.

In Wilmington, the statewide White Supremacy Campaign linked up with the "Secret Nine," a grouping of nine wealthy white men who were plotting a coup against the Wilmington government. Their plans culminated in the Wilmington massacre. State Party Chair Simmons worked with the Nine. Therefore, the Wilmington events can only be understood in relation to this bigger campaign of state and national politics. And those events certainly did not well up from the white working class in Wilmington or elsewhere.

Poor white Southerners lacked leadership

In assessing the pre-populist Reconstruction period, W.E.B. du Bois pointed out a key flaw in all attempts to transform the society of the South: The Southern white working class lacked leadership of their own, and therefore tended to be led by the rich white planters whose class interests were diametrically opposed to their own. This was analogous to those workers today who think that apartheid South African emerald-mine heir Elon Musk has the same interests as them. Du Bois said:

> "The mass of poor whites were in an anomalous position. Those of them who were intelligent or had during slavery accumulated any capital or achieved any position, had always attached themselves in sympathy and interest to the planter class. This meant that the mass of ignorant poor white labor had practically no intelligent leadership. Only here and there were there men, like Hinton Helper [still a white supremacist], who were actual leaders of the poor whites against the planters. The poor white was in a quandary with regard to emancipation. He had viewed slavery as the cause of his own degradation, but he now viewed the free Negro as a threat to his very existence. Suppose that freedom for the Negro meant that Negroes might rise to be landholders, planters and employers? The poor whites thus might lose the last shred of respectability. They had been used to seeing certain classes of the Black slaves above them in economic prosperity and social power. But after all, they were still Negroes and slaves. Now that freedom had come, poor whites were faced by the dilemma of recognizing the Negroes as equals or of bending every effort to still keep them beneath the white mass in income and social power."
> –"Black Reconstruction in America"

If Southern white workers had historically lacked their own leadership, then the advent of populism in the post-Reconstruction period was one solution to that problem. It was not the solution, only a start. As we have already pointed out, there were many contradictions. For example, the movement included wealthier farmers who tended to dominate organizations. Anti-segregationist tendencies struggled with segregationist tendencies. But it still was a start. Organizing was happening across the color line – imperfectly, in fits and starts. But it was happening.

Poor farmers in the South and West were teaming up with industrial labor unions and identifying common enemies in the capitalist class. When the ruling class got the ideological and organizational upper hand with the White Supremacy Campaign and similar onslaughts, this progress was reversed. The Southern white working class went back to following the rich planters and the multinational working-class movement was severely weakened. Then as now, white supremacy is capitalist-class supremacy.

A 'vile and villainous' editorial

It should now be clear that the scene was primed for violence because of the White Supremacy Campaign. No one local incident could be the necessary cause. The powder keg had to already be there in order for something to set it off. One such incident is the response of a Black newspaper editorial to a violent speech calling for the mass murder of Black men.

The one who gave that speech was savvy political figure Rebecca Latimer Felton. She was born to rich Georgia slave owners and upon reaching adulthood, owned slaves herself, along with husband William Harrell Felton. She was the main strategist and propagandist behind her husband's political career, leading him to three stints in the U.S. House as an independent Democrat. Rebecca Felton herself became the first woman in the U.S. Senate in 1922, serving for one day.

The contradictory nature of the Feltons' politics made them especially dangerous. Rebecca was a prominent proponent of women's suffrage – white women's suffrage. They supported education reform and some other progressive causes of the day. They sometimes moved in the same circles as the Populists. But they were dyed-in-the-wool racists. The Civil War had not cured these former slave-owners of their old views.

On Aug. 11, 1897, Rebecca Felton addressed the Georgia Agricultural Society, making her pitch for mass lynching. She brought up the old trope about Black men raping white women and said, "If it needs lynching to protect woman's dearest possession from the ravening human beasts – then I say lynch, a thousand times a week if necessary."

Black Wilmington newspaper editor Alexander Lightfoot Manly responded with an editorial in his paper, *The Daily Record*, which may have been the only Black-owned newspaper in the country at the time. (Manly was the son of a freedman and a free woman of color. He was a descendant of North Carolina Governor Charles Manly and a woman the governor enslaved, Corinne Manly. Alexander Manly graduated from the historically Black Hampton University in Virginia before settling in Wilmington.)

Manly published his response to Felton's disgusting speech on Aug. 18, 1898 barely a week after it had been reprinted. He called out the hypocrisy of the white demagogues who harp on alleged Black rapists while white men are allowed – in fact encouraged by all the social institutions – to sexually abuse Black women. And he affirmed in no uncertain terms that most sexual and romantic relations between Black men and white women were consensual; that was intolerable to the racists. In part, Manly's letter read:

> "Mrs. Felton begins well, for she admits that education will better protect the girls on the farm from the assaulter. This we admit and it should not be confined to the white any more than to the colored girls. The papers are filled often with reports of rapes of white women and the subsequent lynchings of the alleged rapists. The editors pour forth volumes of aspersions against all Negroes because of the few who may be guilty. If the papers and speakers of the other race would condemn the commission of the crime because it is crime and not try to make it appear that the Negroes were the only criminals, they would find their strongest allies in the intelligent Negroes themselves; and together the whites and Blacks would root the evil out of both races. … Don't ever think that your women will remain pure while you are debauching ours. You sow the seeds – the harvest will come in due time."

Despite the dated patriarchal language about women's purity, the truth of Manly's words comes through. It was a fact that women of African descent were sexually abused from slavery on down – systematically.

Manly was quite restrained considering the speech he was responding to. The response of the racist press was rather less so. A headline in the Aug. 24

issue of the *Wilmington Star* read: "Vile and Villainous…Outrageous Attack on White Women by a Negro Paper Published in Wilmington." Below this headline was a paragraph implying imminent danger for the white population followed by a long excerpt from Manly's editorial. Similar coverage appeared all over the state.

A pogrom and a coup d'etat

This hysterical press reaction was just the beginning. In the leadup to the Nov. 8 statewide elections, the Secret Nine and their movement terrorized Wilmington's Black population. These were pogroms, that is, violent riots meant to harm, intimidate, and expel oppressed minority groups. The word entered English through Russian and Yiddish and referred mainly to anti-Jewish riots in the old Russian Empire stoked by the Czarist regime. Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass) was one of the most infamous pogroms. It was carried out in Germany by the Nazis in 1938. The name referred to the shards of glass littering the streets after fascist mobs smashed the windows of Jewish synagogues, shops, and other buildings. The Klan's decades of terrorism following the U.S. Civil War provide many more examples. Wilmington and the Red Shirts – modeled on the Klan and backed by the Democratic Party – was a big one. It was also a coup d'etat.

White Supremacy Campaign leaders provided the white mobs with food and liquor. They spent $1,200 on an early mounted machine gun, the Gatling

Nov. 10, 1898, arson attack on the Black-owned Daily Record in Wilmington, N.C.

gun, to use against unarmed Black people. On Nov. 10, a crowd of 2,000 burned down the Black-owned *Daily Record* at the instruction of former Confederate Colonel Alfred Waddell, who was leading hate rallies. They beat and intimidated every Black person they could find, especially those who had the audacity to exercise their legal right to vote. Estimates of the dead range from 60 to over 300 people. What is clear is that communities were torn apart as thousands of Black people fled the city along with white people whom the racists identified as allies of the Black Wilmingtonians.

The coup perpetrators kicked out the Black office-holders and threw out the aldermen, replacing them with their own people who then appointed Alfred Waddell as mayor. He illegally remained in that position until 1906. The Democratic Party's white supremacist candidates won the congressional elections and in the following years, Black North Carolinians were effectively disenfranchised.

Scramble to be the biggest racist

Populist politicians had worked together with Republicans in the Wilmington fusion government. By the nature of the enterprise, this coalition challenged racism. As described previously in this series, the populist movement involved repeated attempts to combine the strength of both the Black and white laboring masses on the basis of their shared class interests. But was the populist movement totally insulated from racism? Did the populists in North Carolina maintain a principled stand against the White Supremacy Campaign? Unfortunately, the answer to both these questions is "no."

Take the editorial published first in the *Progressive Farmer* and reprinted in the *Charlotte People's Paper* on Nov. 4, just before the election. The article correctly characterizes the Democratic Party's White Supremacy Campaign as swindling whose real objective was to secure "a legislature which will be the tool of plutocracy – of the moneyed men, and that will give us an election law, whose meaning shall be 'those who own property must rule.'"

Very well, but the author went on to say that among the Democrats there is "not one who is a more earnest advocate of white supremacy than we." There we have it! Sections of the populist movement attacked the Democrats from the right, attempting to prove that they were the true white supremacists.

This should be familiar to us today. This sort of capitulation happens when sections of the progressive movement adopt transphobic and other reactionary positions. It happens when sections of the progressive movement attack Palestine solidarity, following the lead of the Democratic Party. Something similar happens when politicians elected to Congress on a progressive ticket vote in favor of the war budget. Something similar happens when supposedly progressive politicians try to out-Trump Trump by demonizing immigrants and trans people. That does not mean that today's movements that enable the election of progressive-talking candidates are disingenuous, and even less so is the case of populism, which involved a big wave of organizing against the big corporations and banks in the 1890s.

As we have seen, this movement had its basis in the massive agricultural alliances that sprang up in the 1870s, including Black farmers' alliances. The movement repeatedly attempted to organize white and Black farmers on the basis of their shared class interests. Movement leaders were keenly aware of these shared interests. That was their objective situation, and they knew that in order to take on the rich, multi-racial collaboration was necessary. This fact could not prevent all racism in the movement, and movement segregation was never overcome. And when the movement waned the racist elements could come to the fore. (Wilmington in 1898 was one of the last stands of populism, with the People's Party dwindling to a tiny size). This shift to the right was driven in part by the pressures of things like the White Supremacy Campaign.

One of the most extreme cases is that of Tom Watson, who in 1896 had been the vice presidential candidate with Democrat William Jennings Bryan on the Populist Party ticket. During his time as a leader in the populist movement, he championed poor farmers and called for Black and white unity. He ran for president on the People's Party ticket in 1904 and 1908, but by that time, the populist movement was basically over. In the period that followed, Watson launched a new career publishing a rabidly racist magazine. Like the fascistic social-media influencers of today, his income depended upon inciting readers with anti-Black, antisemitic, and anti-Catholic/southern European immigrant garbage. He also denounced socialism, which other former populists were embracing.

My argument is not that true populists could not be racist. On the contrary, the inherent contradictions of the movement – its class and national composition, the post-Reconstruction dynamics – are the very source of its pitfalls. There was no pure populism that was then corrupted by influences from outside. Nevertheless, there are essential tendencies of the movement to consider. Again, the tendency toward the alliance of Black and white labor on the basis of their shared class interests. The turn of white populists in North Carolina to accept the logic of the Democrat's White Supremacy Campaign – to attack the Democrats from the right, attempting to be more racist than them: That is an example of the emancipatory potential of populism being squandered.

Du Bois is again helpful in thinking through this troubling problem. There is an analogy with the Northern Union's position on slavery during the war. Even though the Northern Union's initial aim was not to end slavery, it became apparent – because of the objective situation in front of them – that it was impossible to preserve the United States without ending slavery. They had to become anti-slavery, regardless of their personal prejudices.

Until late in the war, Lincoln himself did not always envision an integrated society. He considered many proposals regarding the day after emancipation, one of which was the mass deportation of Black people to Africa. When presented with mathematical proof that this was unfeasible, Lincoln abandoned the idea. (Black Reconstruction in America)

The Northern Union forces had to align themselves with the Black masses who were emancipating themselves during the war, and through shared struggle, many became more progressive. Similarly, when the populist wave appeared, the struggle required unity across race, even if that was never fully achieved. When Reconstruction was defeated, reaction held sway. When populism was defeated, likewise.

From Wilmington 1898 to Ohio 2024

The events in Wilmington have many parallels in our time right down to big money and big political players stoking hate through disinformation, now via social media. The result is violence and disempowerment of the entire working class.

Although progressive movements can and must utilize social media, these companies are owned by racist tech oligarchs who also control the algorithms. This gives the ruling class unprecedented power to disseminate disinformation.

The physical and digital infrastructure that makes social media possible is largely the result of public funding, and the value of social media companies – like all economic value – is generated by workers. These companies should be owned by the working class and run like public utilities, because they are essential utilities – essential for information exchange and social life in the 21st Century. But until then, we have to contend with the oligarchs and their algorithms.

Very much like Wilmington, politicians and fascistic capitalists honed in on Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, during the 2024 presidential election. Fortunately, a massacre did not occur, but life in the town was disrupted with bomb threats and more. We include this piece from Struggle - La Lucha writer Stephen Millies detailing these events as well as background on the ruling class' centuries-long hatred of the revolutionary Haitian people and the history of struggle in Springfield itself.

Immediately following Millies' piece is an article on the response of mostly Black residents of Lincoln Heights, Ohio, to armed neo-Nazis rallying in their community in February, 2025. They successfully ran the Nazis out, showing that it is the people and not the capitalist state who can push back the fascist menace.

Say no to racism in Springfield, Ohio!

Stephen Millies

Sept. 14, 2024

The racist campaign against the Haitian community in Springfield, Ohio, is dangerous and must be stopped.

Both Donald Trump and his running mate, Ohio Senator J.D. Vance, are fanning the flames of racial hatred. They're claiming that Haitians living in Springfield are eating people's pets. Billionaire Elon Musk repeated these lies to his nearly 200 million followers on X (formerly known as Twitter).

These ludicrous allegations using racist stereotypes can't be regarded as a mere joke, as many candidates of the Democratic Party are doing. They are the stuff that can lead to mob violence.

What Trump, Vance, and Musk are telling people is that Haitian people are "dangerous savages" who have to be put down and driven out. A neo-Nazi gang called the Blood Tribe was bellowing the same message when they marched through Springfield in August carrying swastika flags.

Instead of investigating these Nazis, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost is considering filing a lawsuit to prevent migrants from coming to Ohio. That's reminiscent of an 1807 Ohio ordinance that required Black people coming into the state to post a $500 bond.

The tragic death of 11-year-old Adrian Clark last year in Springfield when his school bus was struck by a Haitian driver is being used to whip up racism. The plea of Adrian's father, Nathan Clark, a teacher, not to use his son's death to spread hate is being ignored.

Vance posted on X that "a child was murdered by a Haitian migrant."

Nathan Clark responded at a Springfield City Commission hearing, saying "My son was not murdered. He was accidentally killed by an immigrant from Haiti … don't spin this towards hate."

A man and his child at the Haitian Flag Day Festival in Springfield, Ohio, May 18, 2023.

On Sept. 12, a racist bomb threat forced Springfield's city hall, two schools, and other facilities to be evacuated. The schools involved had many Haitian students.

Revenge for liberating themselves

The current racist hysteria is another chapter in over 230 years of revenge against Haitian people for having conducted the only successful slave revolution in history.

The wealthy and powerful in the United States and Europe have never forgiven Haitians for doing so. From Texas to Maryland, U.S. slave masters lived in fear of "another Haiti" breaking out on their plantations.

It was Haitian President Alexandre Pétion who gave Simón Bolívar ships and guns to liberate much of South America from Spanish colonialism. Venezuela's elected President Nicolás Maduro is standing on the shoulders of Pétion and Bolivar.

The white supremacist President Woodrow Wilson had U.S. Marines steal Haiti's gold reserve and occupy the country for nearly 20 years. The Marine who assassinated the Haitian national hero, Charlemagne Péralte, was obscenely awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

While Trump & Co. are spreading filthy lies about Haitians in Ohio, the Biden Administration wants to re-occupy Haiti using soldiers from Kenya and other countries.

A long history

Springfield, Ohio, has seen mob violence before. Richard Dickerson – sometimes spelled Dixon – was taken from his jail cell there and hanged from a telegraph pole by a mob of racists on March 7, 1904.

Two thousand came to watch the African American die. Revolvers were passed around so that the corpse could be shot up.

After killing Dickerson, the mob then went to the "Levee" district by the river and burned 150 Black people out of their homes. White firefighters did nothing except protect the drinking establishment owned by Charley Bray, a white saloon keeper.

While all this was happening, Company A of the Ohio National Guard's Ninth Battalion – an all-Black outfit – was kept bottled up in the armory by Springfield Mayor Bowlus. – *Cleveland Gazette*

But there's another side to Springfield's history. Seventeen miles away are the Wilberforce University and Central State University campuses, both historically Black institutions (HBCUs).

John Brown lived in Springfield, Ohio from 1845 to 1851, running the "Perkins and Brown" wool warehouse there.

Frederick Douglass first met John Brown in Brown's Springfield home. There, Brown revealed to Douglass his great plan to turn the Allegheny Mountains into a guerilla stronghold. ("John Brown" by W.E.B. Du Bois)

Springfield's Black community righteously rebelled in 1967 against racism.

Like other communities across the Midwest, factory closings have deeply wounded Springfield, pushing back the labor movement. Yet today 1,300 United Auto Workers Local 402 members work at Springfield's Navistar truck plant.

The labor and people's movements have to mobilize to stop the racist hysteria being incited by Trump and Fox News. Beat back the racist attack!

Feb. 7, 2025, Lincoln Heights, Ohio – residents of historically Black community converge to drive out armed neo-Nazi group waving swastika flags on I-75 overpass.

Community drives out Nazis in Ohio

Gregory E. Williams

Feb. 17, 2025

On Feb. 7, a hundred residents of Lincoln Heights, Ohio, drove out a dozen armed neo-Nazis waving swastika flags. This community is about 70 miles from Springfield, where Silicon Valley darling J.D. Vance and Elon Musk whipped up hysteria with lies about Haitian immigrants. Nazi groups also marched in Springfield before Vance's big lie.

Idavox, a local reporter on It's Going Down, said:

> "A neo-Nazi group, 'Hate Club,' showed up on Friday (2/7/25) armed with long guns and flying swastika flags on an I-75 overpass in the Lincoln Heights neighborhood, just north of Cincinnati. They showed up in the wrong damn neighborhood.
>
> "A historically Black community, Lincoln Heights is home to generations of residents committed to a strong sense of community and culture, impactful civic engagement, and self-organization – especially as the first self-governing Black community north of the Mason-Dixon line. So when armed neo-Nazis showed up here there wasn't even a question they were going to get run out. Within minutes of arriving on the I-75 overpass, neo-Nazi group 'hate club' got sent packing as community members, angry that Nazis had come armed to terrorize them in their own neighborhood, showed up to tell the fasc(ists) they weren't having any of it."

The community members were able to seize one of the Nazi flags and burn it.

Police protecting neo-Nazis

WKRC Cincinnati reports that at a town hall on Feb. 10, residents confronted representatives of the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office – the only police agency to attend, even though officers from Lockland and Evandale were involved in the incident. Residents pointed out that footage from the event shows the police protecting the Nazis and helping them escape.

A resident at the town hall said:

"Again, this is super unfortunate because when it comes to African Americans, you guys arrest first and ask questions later. And I just feel like you guys did not do that in that moment."

In the days following the incident, residents formed armed patrols to ensure the community's safety. This is amid ongoing threats. WPCO 9 News reports that four days after the rally on Feb. 11, a flyer was circulated "that used a racial slur and declared a 'race war.'"

These developments show that organized people can push back the shock troops emboldened by the fascist MAGA movement. We cannot rely on the police or courts to do it.

Threats from fascist groups are only going to get worse. On Feb. 14, J.D. Vance met with the successor to the German Nazi Party in Munich, the Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD). Elon Musk appeared virtually at an AfD rally before the Feb. 23 German elections.

Billionaires and MAGA

Unelected Musk is the world's richest oligarch and is currently looting the U.S. people's money in preparation for more tax cuts for billionaires. This is the money of the working people, wealth created through our labor. The convergence of the MAGA movement and Silicon Valley – combined with this naked plunder – shows exactly what the Trump phenomenon is about. It's a big anti-worker swindle. The neo-Nazis on the ground are an essential part of it because the terror they instill is supposed to paralyze the people while the rich hang us out to dry.

But the people in Lincoln Heights aren't bowing down to King Donald and his Co-regent, Elon Musk, and neither should the rest of us!

Charlottesville, Va., Aug. 12, 2017.

Contemporary Southern Governors

Right-wing governors are for the rich, against the people

The relatively decentralized structure of the U.S. government – with its origin in slavery – allows for reactionary policies to be implemented at the state level, often as testing ground for wider rollouts. This is the whole basis of reactionary "states' rights" politics. It is well known that think tanks like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) write model legislation for state legislatures, meant to undermine workers' and oppressed people's rights.

For example, the Trump-stacked Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade in 2022 turned the question of abortion rights over to the states and right-wing legislators already had abortion bans ready to go. The result is women and girls (and trans people assigned female at birth) dying because they can't get medical care. *ProPublica* reported on the 2023 death of pregnant Texas teen Nevaeh Crain who died of sepsis after being denied care by multiple health care providers who feared prosecution:

"Nevaeh Crain was crying in pain, too weak to walk, blood staining her thighs. Feverish and vomiting the day of her baby shower, the 18-year-old had gone to two different emergency rooms within 12 hours, returning home each time worse than before. …Now on Crain's third hospital visit, an obstetrician insisted on two ultrasounds to 'confirm fetal demise,' a nurse wrote, before moving her to intensive care. …Hours later, she was dead."

A later section of this book addresses the career of David Duke. Today, many states are governed by Duke-type politicians, especially in the South. They are key to the country's descent into fascism just as much as Trump. Following are pieces published by *Struggle - La Lucha* dealing with various far-right governors like Ron DeSantis and Greg Abbott.

These governors are all Republicans and aligned with Trump. But it should be noted that Democratic governors are pushing fascism as well. In "blue" California, Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom passed a July 2024 executive order directing the police to intensify repression of people living in homeless encampments. On this issue, he's no different from Republican Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry, who has used the police to clear out New Orleans encampments before the 2025 Super Bowl.

That just goes to show how far right the Democratic Party is, and how far to the right the whole political system has shifted.

Autoworker strike in October 2023.

Behind Southern governors' anti-union agenda

May 1, 2024

Southern politicians who sold their souls to the corporations and banks are a bit rattled right now, and who can blame them? Volkswagen workers won big in Chattanooga, Tennessee, when 73% of plant workers voted to join the United Auto Workers union.

This is the first time that autoworkers have successfully unionized via election in the South since the 1940s! What if more of us workers here in the South get an idea?

Before the vote even happened, six "anti-woke" southern governors put out a joint letter condemning the union. That should tell us how significant the unionization victory is.

Seriously. The Volkswagen vote is a big deal for all workers in the region. When economists compare workers of the same type, with the only difference being whether they're union members, unionized workers earn 10-15% more in wages according to the U.S. Department of the Treasury. That's just wages. Unionized workers have better benefits and working conditions, too.

And unlike with "trickle down economics" – the now totally disproven idea that tax breaks for the ultra-wealthy will trickle down to the rest of us – when it comes to the benefits of unions, the high tide really does lift all workers' boats. The Treasury Department admits that the data is clear on this point. There is a spillover.

For every 1% increase in union membership in the private sector, that results in a 0.3% increase in wages for nonunion workers, and the benefits are greatest for workers without college degrees.

Workers in states that have extreme anti-union laws (misleadingly called "right to work" or RTW laws) make 3.2% less on average than those doing the same job in states with less restrictions on unions. That is to say, full time workers in RTW states like Louisiana or Mississippi make about $1,670 less per year.

The letter written by the governors has a laughable graphic saying "Republican governors stand with American Auto Workers." It's signed by Kay Ivey

(Alabama), Brian Kemp (Georgia), Tate Reeves (Mississippi), Henry McMaster (South Carolina), Bill Lee (Tennessee), and Greg Abbott (Texas). Every word of the statement is a lie. We should ask who they're working for, because it ain't us.

Roster of shame

The governors' main claim is that all the jobs are going to leave if the workforce unionizes. But there is no correlation between whether a state has RTW laws, and thus low unionization rates, and employment. When you look at whether prime working-age people (ages 25-54) have a job in RTW vs. non-RTW states, there's no systematic difference. Fluctuations in employment follow the same capitalist boom-and-bust cycles (expansion followed by recession) across states.

Forbes looked at U.S. Census data for 2023 and ranked the states with highest and lowest poverty levels. Mississippi comes in as the poorest state, with 19.1% living below the federal poverty level. So there's Tate Reeve's state.

(U.S.-occupied Puerto Rico has a poverty rate of 43%, but the island is not a state, so is usually not included on these lists. It's being plundered by corporations and banks. U.S. out of Puerto Rico, now! Puerto Rico will be free!)

Louisiana has the second-highest poverty level, but our governor – Jeff Landry – didn't sign the letter; maybe because auto-manufacturing hasn't taken off here yet. Alabama is the 7th highest, so Kay Ivy gets an "F." South Carolina comes in at number 10; Henry McMaster is another loser.

So, three out of six of the signees govern states in the top 10 poorest. And since they're doing absolutely nothing to alleviate poverty, we can rest assured that they do not care about workers, only about making themselves and their big donors rich. There's no reason to trust them about unions.

Speaking of big donors, a Mississippi Today investigation in late 2023 found that Tate Reeve's top campaign contributors brought home a whopping $1.4 billion in state contracts and grants, all from agencies Reeves oversees. It pays to play! Or is it pay to play?

Texas-sized hypocrisy

According to Market Realist, Greg Abbott has a net worth of $14 million. In December 2023, his campaign received $6 million – "the largest single donation in Texas history," in the campaign's words – from Pennsylvania billionaire Jeff Yass.

Yass is thought to have $29 billion. He's the co-founder and managing director of investment firm Susquehanna International Group.

Why would a Pennsylvania capitalist be funding Texas politics? Because he champions the anti-public school voucher movement, tax cuts for billionaires, and all manner of other things that only benefit the rich. He's making an investment in Texas.

The truth is that there is nothing unusual about these shenanigans, and Democratic politicians are no better. The Washington Post said it: "More than half of those who served in the House and Senate were worth more than $1 million; many had net worths that stretched into the tens of millions."

We should not be surprised where these capitalist politicians' allegiances lie. Every time they try to stir us up about unions, trans people, immigrants, or some supposed foreign adversary, we should ask: "What's in it for you?"

Follow the money: Exposing the capitalists behind attacks on abortion rights

November 21, 2022

On Nov. 13, the Louisiana Abortion Rights Action Committee (LARAC) made a significant contribution to the movement with their webinar, "Follow the Money: End the Capitalist War on Women." Since the ultra-right-wing Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade, LARAC has led resistance in the streets of New Orleans. Louisiana has one of the strictest abortion bans in the country.

The webinar addressed how the right-wing movement attacking the reproductive rights of women and other child-bearing people is funded by and serves the interests of the filthy-rich capitalists. This is a fact often left out of the abortion discussion in the mainstream media, where the "debate" is framed in terms of differences in religious views and paints an image of a right-wing movement coming out of nowhere.

Those leading the militant fightback in Louisiana and elsewhere know better.

Exposing Louisiana monarchy

LARAC activists began their exposé at the state level. As Edith Romero of LARAC put it, "It's important to know who are the people in power." Loui-

siana Attorney General Jeff Landry, who is expected to run for governor, has played a major role in attacking abortion rights.

Romero, an immigrant healthcare worker, explained: "Jeff Landry is a very vocal anti-abortion, anti-vaxx, sexist, transphobic, homophobic person … He sued to get rid of Medicaid, depriving 700,000 people of much needed medical services … He sued several times against mask mandates and basic safety policies in Louisiana … He sued to cancel DACA …

"Multiple of his companies hire immigrant workers to pay them less than U.S.-born workers … He is anti-immigrant but needs them for his own benefit. He fought diligently to criminalize abortion and have it as a crime that can be prosecuted."

Romero laid out the forces funding Landry's right-wing politics. His campaign contributors in 2021 include Inwood Petroleum (contributed $80,000); oil and gas company Harvey Gulf International Marine ($50,000); and more. The presentation explained that Landry himself, unsurprisingly, has big stakes in oil and gas companies.

The same capitalists who are profiting by destroying our planet are reaping the benefits of dividing the working class with vicious attacks on women, LGBTQ2S people and people of color.

Military-industrial complex is anti-women

LARAC organizer Elena Voisin, a student at Loyola University, explained the role of the military-industrial complex in the anti-women assaults.

"Just this year, close to $2 trillion was given to the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy … They contract hundreds of billions of dollars to businesses [like Lockheed Martin]. All of this is to create exorbitant profits for them and their government conspirators …

"Every year these corporations spend hundreds of millions to influence politicians … all to get them to increase the defense budget. And the next year they are given even larger contracts, so the bribes pay off … Not to mention politicians' personal investments in these corporations …

"How does the government finance this? Taxes and banks. Banks are profiting off wars. The government never has enough reserve funds to finance their wars, so they have to resort to loans … Under the guise of reducing the national debt, they cut social programs … They will cut anything except military spending."

Webinar host Sally Jane Black – a queer, trans woman worker – added that "the same right-wing organizations pushing this anti-abortion agenda are the ones pushing the military-industrial complex."

Indeed, the U.S. imperialists' military spending is an all-out assault on the working class in this country as well as on those harmed and killed in target countries.

HEALTHCARE ACCESS FOR ALL!
AG LANDRY RACIST, SEXIST ANTI-WORKER PUPPET OF THE RICH
STRIKE FOR ABORTION RIGHTS SHUT IT DOWN
STRIKE
for ABORTION RIGHTS
SHUT IT DOWN
WORKERS VOICE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT
NOLA activists shutting down the streets for reproductive rights in July 2022.

Voisin explained the mechanisms of "control and suppression" at play here. "Especially without social programs to help, the medical and childcare expenses alone can trap whole families in poverty. There is already little social mobility, but now it's out of the question …

"Abortion restrictions are just one part of the super-exploitation of the working class. This exploitation is necessary for the military-industrial complex … The sooner we come together as workers against our common enemies, the sooner we can all be liberated."

Roe v. Wade won in the streets

LARAC organizer and hospitality worker Heidi Jordan debunked the view that progressive movements can be successful by playing by the oppressors' rules. Jordan stated: "Representatives of the oppressor always say, 'just wait, it'll change, we'll change,' but history has demonstrated over and over again that that's not true. They placate. They use bribery, flattery, grants, deception and positions." Jordan explained that when these "soft" tactics fail, the capitalist state does not hesitate to use brutal repression.

Progressive change does not come down from benevolent rulers. Rather, it is the power of the organized people that forces the rulers to make concessions. Roe v. Wade was won in just such a way, Jordan explained.

"The struggle for the right to a safe, legal abortion in the 1970s was part of a broader movement for women's liberation. Roe v. Wade was won in the street, not in the homes of rich women or in the halls of Congress."

In a sharp rebuke to those who want us to isolate our struggles and to undermine solidarity among all working-class and oppressed people, Jordan cited the historical record, showing how the women's movement of the 1970s fought on all fronts—for LGBTQ2S rights, against racism, in support of the Black Panther Party, and to end the U.S. imperialists' war of aggression against Vietnam.

She explained, furthermore, that this was a global movement. To be effective, today's struggle must be as broad as its predecessor.

Bringing it all together

Gavrielle Gemma, with LARAC and NOLA-based Workers Voice Socialist Movement, summed up many aspects of the appeal that LARAC is making.

"We call it abortion access because even when we had the legal right, we had to defend it with our bodies against attacks," Gemma said. "We felt that it was very important to expose who are the forces behind and funding these right-wing assaults …The hidden economic hand is left untouched [in the discussions that focus just on elections]. [And there was] $17 billion spent on these recent elections …

"The right-wing didn't completely create a tsunami against the Democrats … But what we have had is the predominance in the economy of the military, as well as oil and gas, and insurance and banking—these are controlling elements of the capitalist economy, and they are controlling the political situation. These are far-right-wing forces …

"We are the ones that are being targeted by the super-rich … [There has been an] unbelievable accumulation of wealth in fewer and fewer hands. This has gone on through all administrations."

Gemma made a moving appeal to take the movement to the next level, not relying on official channels—not even those of the supposedly progressive Democratic Party.

"We should be up there [in Baton Rouge] linking arms at the Louisiana State Capitol when they are back in session in the spring … They are terrified of our unity."

Transgender Day of Visibility: NOLA high school students walk out, leading hundreds in the streets

March 31 – On International Transgender Day of Visibility, hundreds of students at New Orleans' Benjamin Franklin High School walked out of class. Benjamin Franklin students did the same last year in March as the fascist attack on trans people escalated.

Now the attacks have reached a fevered pitch nationally, with Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry, an oil-and-gas-investment millionaire, leading the charge in this state. Landry is running for governor, using a playbook similar to that of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis.

The students rallied outside of class. NOLA.com reported some of their powerful statements:

> "'People who will never ever understand how it feels to live my life are attempting to control it in ways that will leave not only me, but many other transgender people devastated, depressed or even at risk of physical harm,' said Vincent Jarand, a 16-year-old trans student. 'This is the beginnings of a genocide.'
>
> "Jackie Kimbrough, a Black trans 17-year-old, wiped away tears talking about the impact the bills could have on LGBTQ youth in the state. 'I'm 17 years old, and I'm fighting for my life,' Kimbrough said."

These students are serious leaders inspiring the broader progressive movement. Starting at 5:30 p.m., they led a 500-person-strong march from Washington Square Park, through the French Quarter, to Jackson Square. This square itself has been a site of intense struggle, as Take 'Em Down NOLA has fought to have the name changed from that of the genocidal U.S. President Andrew Jackson.

Marchers took over the streets and then the amphitheater across from Jackson Square, shouting militant chants like, "If they don't see us, if they don't hear us, you'd best believe they're going to fear us!" High school students and others gave speeches.

The students were joined by groups including Real Name Campaign NOLA, Freedom Road Socialist Organization – New Orleans, ACLU of Louisiana, college branches of Students for a Democratic Society, and others. This was an example of working class and oppressed people from multiple generations working together to take a stand against the far right's assaults.

Top right with fist , Miss Major Griffin-Gracy a veteran of the Stonewall Rebellion addressed the rally.

Palestine flag on display at National March to Protect Trans Youth.

Below, Samira Burnside, on the center of the banner, leads the march in downtown Orlando.

Photos: Lexi Webster / CCR

Historic march for trans youth sweeps Florida city

Struggle-La Lucha Orlando, Florida,
October 12, 2023

A historic march for transgender rights took place in Orlando, Florida, on Oct. 7. Organized by a trans-led, ad hoc coalition of groups and individuals from across the country, the National March to Protect Trans Youth and Speakout for Trans Lives drew hundreds of people from across the state, from Georgia and Louisiana, and as far away as California, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana and New York.

Young trans people, parents and families of trans youth, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and allies rallied outside Orlando City Hall. Under blazing blue skies, they marched through downtown Orlando's Seneff Arts Plaza, waving Trans Pride and Progress Pride flags, holding protest signs, and chanting, "DeSantis says get back, we say fight back!" and "HRT, HRT, over the counter and all for free!"

"Rallies like this are important to us," declared **Miss Major Griffin-Gracy** (she/her), a veteran of the Stonewall Rebellion and a lifelong fighter for trans rights. "We need each other. We have gone through this before. We've gone through it time and time again. And we're not going to give up now.

"Whatever you do, don't give up," she urged. "We've got to fight, fight, fight!"

It was the first national mobilization against the current wave of anti-trans hate to take place in one of the states at the epicenter of the attack on trans lives – Florida, where Republican governor and presidential candidate Ron DeSantis has signed numerous laws and administrative measures aimed a driving trans people from public life and depriving them of health care, especially targeting young people.

Orlando-area activists expressed great enthusiasm for the march, welcoming trans and cis activists from across the country to stand with them. For many, it was a welcome act of solidarity, in contrast to mainstream LGBTQ+ nonprofits and liberal figures that have urged people to flee or stay away – something many people, especially youth, simply cannot and don't want to do.

We keep us safe

Women in Struggle-Mujeres en Lucha, the initiator of the march, together with several protest organizers and speakers, was the plaintiff in a lawsuit seeking emergency relief from Florida's so-called bathroom ban, which makes it illegal for trans people to use the restroom that aligns with their gender in public buildings and facilities, including airports, rest stops, libraries, schools, and colleges.

The Center for Constitutional Rights and Southern Legal Counsel attorneys represented the plaintiffs. A federal court refused to grant a hearing before the march, dismissing the case on procedural grounds at 5 p.m. the night before. Nevertheless, organizers said the case brought attention to the protest and helped build excitement for Saturday's march.

"We filed the case in the middle district of Florida," said CCR attorney **Zee Scout (she/her)**. "Last night, we learned that a judge disagreed with our case and dismissed our appeal for emergency relief.

"That doesn't mean we're done. Today's march is everything, but above all, it is a message that this movement will continue."

In the days leading up to the march, the event was targeted on social media by anti-trans hate groups. Organizers of the National March prepared a robust people's defense plan to keep the pro-trans crowd safe.

Only a handful of bigots actually showed up to counter-protest, and they were effectively blocked by protest signs and members of the Umbrella Brigade, an Orlando-area abortion-rights group, wielding their rainbow umbrellas. A few locally known white supremacists who showed up to menace the crowd were chased off by the security team.

"The security preparations for the rally and march were very comprehensive," **Anaïs Kochan (she/her)** told *Struggle-La Lucha*. "I was proud to join the group securing the march. But the most useful aspect were the incredibly talented people, local groups and organizations, who came to us with their skills and intelligence, ready to help us pull off a safe event. I loved working with them."

'I can't leave'

The Oct. 7 rally and speakout was co-chaired by **Samira Burnside (she/her),** editor of *The Queer Notion*, from Tampa, Florida; **Andie Albanito (they/them)** of the Umbrella Brigade in Orlando; **Tsukuru Fors (he/they)** of

Red Berets for Queers, from Los Angeles; and **Sally Jane Black (she/her)** of the Louisiana Women's Action Committee, based in New Orleans.

Seventeen-year-old Samira Burnside was a leading organizer of the National March. She said: "There are buses that take kids up north to safer homes. There is a new class of political migrants. Every day, another one of my friends resolves to flee. Most folks I know at least have escape plans. Many have abandoned their in-state dream colleges for the ability to live their lives.

"To be trans and to not be an activist is to live in a burning house and to ignore the smoke. I can't leave all the people who can't leave. I can't leave all the people who can't get their medicine. I can't leave all the poor trans people who could never just pack up and go. I can't leave all the people like me who have known and loved this place since they were born.

"And it's in this resolution that I contend with this simple fact: That Ron DeSantis and those like him are trying to steal my future and trying to steal yours too."

Another Florida activist, **Lindsey Spero** (they/he), works to support trans youth. In February, they boldly injected their testosterone hormone therapy during a protest in front of the Florida Board of Medicine. Spero said: "Despite the hostility that brings us here, I am surrounded by some of the most brilliantly kind and beautifully bold humans this world has to offer.

"Each person in this space is changing the world simply by breathing. Every day of life, you are defying a state that says you should not exist.

"Trans liberation is a collective goal we share as we seek to heal our bodies, nurture younger generations, and build healthy, lasting communities while we pursue bold, creative love. But we still gotta fucking pee! Access to bathrooms is a basic human right."

'Trans people are part of the working class'

Melinda Butterfield (she/her), a member of Women in Struggle and co-editor of *Struggle-La Lucha,* said: "We aren't alone in our struggle. Many other communities are being targeted. We have to work to create unity, solidarity, and cooperation. That's why the demands of our action aren't limited to those issues specific to trans people but include the fight against racism, for reproductive rights, for workers' rights, against censorship. Trans people are part of those communities. We are part of the working class.

"We are health care workers, service workers, teachers, tech workers, sex workers. We are Teamsters and Auto Workers, Amazon delivery drivers and Starbucks baristas, screen actors and screenwriters. All too often, we are underpaid and unemployed. We live the reality of intersectionality every day.

"Standing up for trans people is an act of self-defense for all workers. An injury to one is an injury to all."

Christynne Lili Wrene Wood (she/her) is a trans woman who was targeted by a national hate campaign that started earlier this year in the San Diego suburb of Santee.

She asked the crowd: "How would one go about destroying a civilization? Here's what I would imagine: Destroy legitimate public education and dedicated teachers and administrators who have sworn their lives to the ethical and honest portrayal of history, whether it hurts certain feelings or not!

"Point number 2: Replace qualified and ethical medical professionals with 'doctors' that shouldn't even be allowed to attend to houseplants much less human beings, and then threaten the legitimate medical professionals with imprisonment for speaking the truth!"

'We have a common enemy'

Emmett Santisi (he/him) of the Teamsters National LGBTQ+ Caucus said: "Connecticut, where I come from, is seen as a safe space for trans people, and I'm seeing a lot of people moving there from places like Florida. But this is a false sense of security, as we are seeing a steady increase in transphobic and fascist propaganda cropping up all over the state.

"Any rights that the queer community has enjoyed were won as a result of grassroots organizing over the course of decades, involving huge numbers of ordinary people like you and me, who refuse to stay in the closet."

Santisi announced that the Pride Caucus of Teamsters Local 1150 was holding a simultaneous trans rights rally in New Haven.

"The same capitalists who are funding DeSantis here are funding Jeff Landry's gubernatorial campaign in Louisiana," explained Sally Jane Black. "The same people who fund them are also funding the Democrats across the country. The same people are funding the anti-trans laws, the anti-abortion laws, the attacks on our immigrant siblings, and they're attacking all of our social programs and all workers' rights, which we've won over the years. And the same people are responsible for endless war and climate change.

"We all have this common enemy, the capitalist class," she said. "They're very organized, and so far, they have been successful at keeping us divided. That's the purpose of these laws and the attacks upon us: to make us hate each other instead of standing united against them.

"But there are more of us than there are of them. We outnumber them greatly. Today we've shown them: We're certainly outnumbering the fascists here today. Today has to be the start of building a movement that remains united," Black concluded.

'DeSantis is the snake's head'

Adria Jawort (she/her) is an Indigenous Two-Spirit trans woman from Montana and executive director of Indigenous Transilience: "People asked: Why are you going all the way down to Florida? Because DeSantis is like the snake's head of anti-LGBTQ and transphobia. Whatever happens here is like a contagious disease; it starts spreading out to all the other states, including my state, Montana.

"I love giving lectures on Indigenous LGBTQ Two Spirit history," Jawort said. "I got an email from the library where I was scheduled to speak at the start of Pride Month saying, 'We have to cancel your lecture over the new drag law.' I had testified against the anti-drag bill, saying this law could be used to target trans people. The proponents said, 'Oh no, it won't.'

"I knew there had been complaints about my lecture the week before. I figured it was white nationalists. Sure enough, they posted on Reddit, 'After our campaign of complaints we got this event canceled.' So the county catered to the whims of actual Nazis. When your policies are on the side of Nazis, you're on the wrong side of history."

Tsukuru Fors said: "When we talk about states like Texas and Florida, we Californians sometimes say things like, 'Oh, they are horrible states,' but they are not. Coming here and interacting with all of you, I see this is a beautiful place. It's just that there are people who want to rule by fear and hate.

"In my antinuclear work, I've worked with many displaced people. No one should be displaced. This is your home. You should be able to live here, be safe, be loved, and pursue dreams as who you are. That is why we fight."

Other speakers included: Andrea Montanez, an immigrant trans woman from Colombia; Gina Davila and Laura Rodriguez of the Tampa 5, student protesters facing felony charges; youth organizer Zander Moriczon; Tatiana

Sally Jane Black (she/her) of the Louisiana Women's Action Committee, based in New Orleans at rally at the Speakout for Trans Lives in Orlando, Florida on Oct 7, 2022.

Quiroga, executive director of Come Out With Pride Orlando; Simon Rowe, a young trans member of Teamsters Local 79 in Tampa; and Jamila Nicole, Orlando for Gender Equality.

Also: Serena Sojic-Borne, New Orleans Real Name Campaign; Joseph Rosenzweig, Workers Voice Socialist Movement; Lizz Toledo and Gregory E. Williams, Struggle for Socialism Party; and Karla Correa, Party for Socialism and Liberation. Musical performances were given by Leo Roger and Milo Paul.

"I met a young trans woman who traveled to Orlando by bus from the small Florida town where she lives," Melinda Butterfield told SLL. "It was her very first protest. She stayed the whole day. When I spoke to her again at the end of the rally, she was very enthusiastic and grateful for the sense of community she found with us. Her bravery was so inspiring to me.

"Providing hope and solidarity to the next generation of fighters is everything. That's the guarantee that we will win."

Sally Jane Black: 'We have to do the work' to build a united movement

October 17, 2023

Talk given by Sally Jane Black of the Louisiana Women's Action Committee at the Oct. 7 National March to Protect Trans Youth and Speakout for Trans Lives in Orlando, Florida.

I have lived my entire life here in the South, part of the country so many people have abandoned and written off. But I am standing right here in Florida, seeing all of you marching with us, and I am inspired.

I am honored and inspired to be here in solidarity with you. I am honored and inspired to stand with those of you who are right here on the front-lines of the fightback against fascism here in Florida and the Ron DeSantis regime. Y'all are standing up against DeSantis and against the billionaire backers who pull his strings.

Back home in Louisiana, we have our own fascist puppets to worry about. Right now, state Attorney General Jeff Landry – an arch-racist scumbag – is running for governor and leading the far-right agenda there. The same capitalists who are funding DeSantis here are funding his campaign. The same people who fund them, they're also funding the Democrats across the country.

The same people are funding the anti-trans laws, the anti-abortion laws, the attacks on our immigrant siblings, and they're attacking all of our social programs and all workers' rights which we've won over the years. And the same people are responsible for endless war and climate change.

We all have this common enemy: the capitalist class. They're very organized, and so far they have been successful at keeping us divided. That's the purpose of these laws and the attacks upon us, to make us hate each other instead of standing united against them.

But there are more of us than there are of them. We outnumber them greatly. Today we've shown them: We're certainly outnumbering the fascists here today.

Today has to be the start of building a movement that remains united. Today has to be the start of all of us coming together.

'Turn hundreds into millions'

As many of you here saw, our demands go beyond just the attacks on trans people here in Florida. We're standing here today in solidarity with everyone who is under attack by the fascists and the capitalists who back them, the capitalists who coordinated their campaigns around the country. We have to continue that fight. We have to sustain this. We have to build from this. We have to turn the hundreds who have turned out here today into millions. And we can do it.

In order to do that, in order to build a movement that is united, we're gonna have to do the work. We're gonna have to keep showing up. And the unfun part is we're gonna have to get out there and talk to people who might not yet be on our side, who might not yet know that we are all in the same fight.

We're gonna have to be willing to talk to people who don't yet agree with us. I'm not talking about the fascists or the Klan, but I am talking about people who might not have heard anything about trans rights before today. They might not realize these attacks on trans people are attacks on them as well. We have to be willing to talk to them, and get that message to them.

If they can tell us how to dress and which bathroom to use, they can tell anyone how to dress and which bathroom to use. If they succeed at these attacks on us, they'll succeed with these attacks on everyone. That's what they're doing right now.

I encourage all of you to help us keep building this movement because in the coming year, we're not just gonna be facing the continued attacks of these fascists and the capitalists. We're also going to be facing massive campaigns from both Democrats and Republicans to draw everybody into the election next year.

I'm not telling you not to vote. You can vote, that's fine, but it's gonna take more than voting. We have to build a movement. We have to grow that movement. We have to bring every progressive group and force out there together so that no matter who is in office, they will answer our demands.

That's what it's gonna take to beat back the fascists, to beat back the capitalists, and to win our liberation. We owe it to ourselves to do this.

Protesters against Jeff Landry gather in the rain outside gubernatorial debate in Lafayette, LA, Sept. 15, 2013. Photo: Real Name Campaign

Louisiana protest: 'AG Landry, you're a crook! Kids deserve to read gay books!'

Sept. 15, Lafayette, Louisiana – This writer joined over 30 protesters against corrupt far-right gubernatorial candidate Jeff Landry. We gathered outside KLFY studios where the second gubernatorial debate was happening; Landry skipped the first one, claiming that debate hosts would not treat him fairly, and has generally skirted other interactions with his rival candidates.

The action was led by both cis and trans women. Participating organizations included Real Name Campaign NOLA, Reproductive Freedom Acadiana, Louisianahbrah, DSA Southwest Louisiana, and Struggle for Socialism Party.

Amanda Anderson, an organizer with Reproductive Freedom Acadiana, told the crowd, "Although we have these fascist, bigoted, corrupt politicians imposing restrictions on us, our state is in fact composed of diverse people, like the people that showed up here today. … We have the people, power, and persistence to protect and restore fundamental rights back to the people."

Quest Riggs of Real Name Campaign said, "Do the majority of Louisianians want to oppress their neighbors? Hell no! Does Jeff Landry want to oppress the people of this state? Absolutely."

We chanted, "AG Landry, you're a crook! Kids deserve to read gay books!" When Landry came out, we got as close as we could, pummeling him with noise as he rushed to his vehicle and sped off. So long, janky Jeff! (Another popular slogan from the night.)

Anderson's words about our diverse community ring true. I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know activists of many ages and backgrounds from across the state. We even had dinner together after the action, strengthening the feeling of solidarity. We are prepared to fight against the far-right, capitalist onslaught.

Who is Jeff Landry?

Landry is cut from the same cloth as Ron DeSantis of Florida and Greg Abbott of Texas, basing his campaign on targeting trans youth and other vulnerable groups. This is his only appeal since he has nothing to offer the state's working class. He opposes raising Louisiana's $7.25 minimum wage and even says there shouldn't be a minimum wage.

This is the same man who sued to kick 700,000 Louisianaians off Medicaid. Apparently, he doesn't care whether we live or die. Considering the following from *The Gambit*, we can sum up Landry's attitude as "I got mine, screw you!"

"As Attorney General, Landry makes $104,942.72 a year – nearly four times the average income for Louisianans. He also has significant sources of outside income. According to Landry's financial disclosure forms – which only require ranges of income, rather than specific amounts – in 2022 he made between $160,000 and $414,000 from outside sources. Landry also reported investment holdings – all of which are held in his wife's name – worth as much as $2.4 million."

As the state's attorney general, he pushed for strict abortion bans. His office has come under fire – including in this debate – for attempting to track women seeking abortions out of state.

In close collaboration with the St. Tammany Parish Library Accountability Project, a de facto anti-LGBTQ+ group similar to the misnamed Moms for Liberty, Landry has gone after library books. The group's founder and Landry associate, Connie Nichols Phillips, cost taxpayers in her parish $72,000 processing the 150 book challenges she submitted.

The St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Department has issued a misdemeanor summons to Phillips, who appeared in a viral video assaulting a library supporter outside a parish council meeting.

Last year, it came to light that Landry spent more than $420,000 from campaign donors on his own staffing company. The above are only a few of his ongoing scandals.

Louisiana: Which way forward for the anti-Landry movement?

October 23, 2023

Dismal statistics

Mothers, neonates, and infants die at high rates in Louisiana. That's been documented for years. A 2023 report by the United Health Foundation shows that it's getting worse: They ranked Louisiana 48 out of 50 states for worst health outcomes for women and children. The death rates are increasing faster than national averages. The only states ranking lower are Arkansas and Mississippi.

The data from 2016 to 2021 reveal that, for Louisiana, infant mortality increased by 5%. Child mortality increased by 16%. The Louisiana Department of Health reported in 2019 that Louisiana ranks 47 out of 48 states for maternal mortality.

These are dismal statistics, and they contain within themselves all the other dismal statistics relating to the state, like a hellishly repeating fractal. Reflected here is all the systemic racist violence (the death rates are much higher for Indigenous and Black mothers, infants, and children); it reflects the war of the rich on the working class, with poverty being high (poor white people are not doing well here, let it be noted); it reflects the mass incarceration; it reflects the fact that the oil and gas companies are poisoning the water we drink and the very air we breathe.

So, what's the use of a 'war on woke'?

With our quality of life being so low and getting worse, it's hard to fathom how anyone could imagine that things could be made any better by policing who uses what bathroom or censoring classroom discussions of race; such attacks only make our lives worse, as is evident from Ron DeSantis' tenure as Florida's governor.

Nevertheless, far-right bigot Jeff Landry is now governor-elect. He asserted in his victory speech that "today's election says that our state is united." He wants us to think he has a mandate to rule.

Is that true? Voter turnout hardly demonstrated mass enthusiasm for his Ron DeSantis-style "culture war" politics, centered on attacking trans people and other oppressed groups on behalf of the capitalist class.

He got only about half (51%) of the vote, and that's just the start of the election turnout story. Very low voter turnout meant that only 35.8% of the state's 3 million registered even went to the polls. In Orleans Parish, voter turnout was just 27%. Put another way, 64.2% of registered voters didn't vote. Yet another way: Only 18% of registered voters voted for Landry. So much for a state united around him.

On the other hand, the fascistic right wing was activated, and we know that it only takes a small number of them to shift the balance of power – not least of all because they're well-funded. For example, one person, book-banning Landry lackey Connie Nichols Phillips – who faced a sheriff's department summons for assaulting a library supporter outside of a St. Tammany Parish council meeting – filed over 150 library book complaints in that parish.

Phillips is what has been called a "serial filer." That's typical of the book-banning movement nationally. Nationwide, a mere 11 people filed 60% of library book challenges in 2021-2022. However, with the backing of Landry, she and the group she co-founded, the St. Tammany Parish Library Accountability Project, led a successful campaign to ram through a bill to restrict minors' access to library books. The cooked-up controversy was based on scapegoating queer and trans people.

We know who he serves

Landry was a state representative and has been attorney general since 2016. While in office, he has demonstrated what his politics are about and which class he serves (the rich). As an oil and gas millionaire, Landry has consistently promoted the interests of fossil fuel profits, even as the state suffers catastrophic effects of climate change. He has fomented hatred of Muslims and LGBTQ+ people, even though his own brother is gay (some "family values"). He championed the near-total abortion ban, which is now in effect after the overturn of Roe v. Wade. In 2018, he supported a lawsuit jeopardizing Medicaid coverage for some 850,000 people in the state with preexisting conditions.

During the gubernatorial campaign, he stated emphatically that he opposed raising the state's $7.25 an hour minimum wage and even that the minimum wage should be abolished. That would make his donors happy!

Landry's path to the governor's mansion

As the current attorney general, Landry has made a name for himself, energizing the ranks of the far right by attacking oppressed groups and the working class. While acting as the state's top cop, he paved his way to the governor's mansion, using the whole past year – at least – to campaign. He got the coveted Trump endorsement. This year, he and the Louisiana Republican Party paid nearly $22,000 over the course of a few months to Trump's Mar-a-Lago for fundraising events there. Between 2019-2022, his campaign spent $54,000 at a Trump-owned hotel in Washington, D.C.

He spent $9 million on TV ads. But all that paid off because he raised far more money than any other candidate. And as we know about U.S. elections, candidates pay to play.

Before all that happened, the Republican Party eschewed norms and endorsed Landry the moment he announced his campaign last year – before any other Republican candidates came forward. The anti-democratic thrust of this is glaring and is even commented upon in the bourgeois press.

What about the Democratic Party?

The Democrats didn't galvanize anybody or offer an alternative vision to Landry's anti-woke campaign. The state party was effectively absent throughout the campaign season. In the days following the election, editorials and news segments are filled with calls for the leadership to resign.

Even if they had expended more energy on their candidate, Shawn Wilson, it is not clear that voters would have been moved. They've had a Democratic governor for eight years and have not seen much change in their lives except for the worse. And he's an anti-abortion Democrat, no less!

We also have a Democrat in the White House. While offering nothing to the millions of people struggling to get by in this country, Biden just got on television and said he wants to spend many more billions of our tax dollars on U.S. wars and the militarized southern border. He's building part of Trump's border wall.

Whatever the case, it is evident that the Democratic Party will not come to save us as Landry and the Republican supermajority state legislature intensify the attacks on working class and oppressed communities. People should vote if they want to. There have been bitter but righteous struggles for voting

rights, and the far right is trying to roll back those rights across the country. But we're going to have to organize ourselves in the streets.

What kind of movement is needed?

We can sum up some things we know. A) Quality of life in our state is low and getting worse. B) The "war on woke" will do absolutely nothing to improve our condition and will only lead to more harm; C) There was no groundswell for Landry. He won the governorship by spending a huge amount of money to activate a small section of extreme right-wing voters at a time when much of the state appears to be disillusioned with electoral politics. D) Landry represents the interests of the rich and no one else. We know what his politics are because they have been on display for all the years he has held office. E) With his track record – aided by the Republican supermajorities in the state legislature – he will likely unleash far-reaching and vicious attacks on the population. F) The Democratic Party is not coming to our rescue.

This sounds rather bleak, but there may be some advantages in the situation. We are not without fighting organizations. There is already an anti-Landry movement.

In the aftermath of the Trump-stacked Supreme Court's overturn of Roe v. Wade, groups like the Louisiana Abortion Rights Action Committee hit the streets with a clear message about the danger of Landry. The action has not just been in New Orleans. Various groups have protested the attacks on queer and trans people at the capitol in Baton Rouge and confronted Landry at the gubernatorial debate held in Lafayette. Participating organizations in that action included Real Name Campaign NOLA, Reproductive Freedom Acadiana, Louisianahbrah, DSA Southwest Louisiana, and Struggle for Socialism Party.

Local fightbacks alone will not be enough. We can learn from these recent experiences and deepen our connections across the state. We should link up now, not waiting for the attacks to come. But as they do come, we will have more opportunities to carry out exposure of Landry and the racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic capitalist class that he represents.

We should be able to join forces with everyone who is struggling, for example, with Rise St. James and other activists who have bravely struggled and won major victories against the petrochemical plants destroying their communities along the Mississippi River; these are largely working-class and

Black activists who are living at the heart of the contradiction, where racism and environmental degradation meet.

We need to be ready to forge connections and find ways to bring working-class people who are not already activists into the movement and to develop them as leaders. We will need a united movement that can serve as a "tribune of the people," as Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin put it; that is to say, a movement, with movement organizations, that can respond to every attack on the people no matter what it is and serve as the people's mouthpiece.

Unionization rates are low in Louisiana, but we do have unions. We'll need them. If Landry is emboldened enough to attack Medicaid again, we'll need all the forces of the working class to fight back.

And God forbid, but what about the next hurricane? What struggles will emerge then with Landry in the governor's mansion?

One more thing. A Louisiana-only movement may not be enough. Landry is part of a wave of far-right, really fascist politicians, not just limited to the U.S. But we can see the trend right in neighboring states like Texas, with Greg Abbott; Tate Reeves in Mississippi; Kay Ivey in Alabama; and DeSantis in Florida. We must build a united movement across the country and especially across the South.

Many of us who are active in the New Orleans LGBTQ+ and women's struggles participated in the Oct. 7 National March to Protect Trans Youth in Orlando, Florida. We met people from across the country and Florida itself. We learned from Floridians' struggles and raised our voices so that they don't have to face DeSantis alone. I am convinced that this type of national organizing is the way forward. I'm convinced that when we fight Landry in the coming period, Orlando and people from many other states will have our backs.

Louisiana needs a statewide anti-Landry movement

May 17, 2024

June 1 will mark five months in office for Louisiana's far-right governor, Jeff Landry. In this short amount of time, he and the Republican supermajority state legislature have unleashed a barrage of attacks on the state's working-class and oppressed people.

These range from greenlighting new, cruel methods of execution (such as asphyxiation by nitrogen gas) to deregulating homeowners' insurance, mak-

ing it easier for giant corporations to raise rates and drop customers. He sent the state's National Guard to the Mexico-U.S. border in Texas, wasting three million in taxpayer dollars to further scapegoat immigrants for the problems caused by U.S. capitalism.

At this point, the anti-Landry movement has yet to fully flower, but the potential is there. Various organizations are keeping up the pressure. And the huge Palestine solidarity movement has kept people marching in the streets of the greater New Orleans area and in Baton Rouge, showing that the will to resist is strong.

Activists set up a pro-Palestine encampment in New Orleans' Jackson Square. Tulane and Loyola students set up a joint encampment about a day later. Both encampments were violently cleared by police, but resistance has continued.

Students and faculty at historically Black, Xavier University successfully got pro-genocide U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Linda Thomas-Greenfieled, dropped from speaking at graduation.

Concerted action works, even in Louisiana. What's needed is a statewide movement uniting everyone who's under attack.

HB608, the 'trans erasure bill'

Despite having a gay brother who has spoken out against Landry's anti-LGBTQIA+ bigotry, the governor has accelerated the attacks on our communities.

The Queer and Trans Community Action Project (QTCAP) is one organization that has led marches against Landry and showed up to protest at the legislature in Baton Rouge. They have sounded the alarm about the "trans erasure bill." Their statement says:

> "HB608, sponsored by Rep. Roger Wilder III, seeks to legally define 'sex' as an individual's gender assigned at birth, functionally and knowingly erasing trans people from the law. This bill would ban trans people's safe access to bathrooms and beds in schools, prisons/jails, and domestic violence shelters."

The statement goes on to say that Wilder and other legislators (with Landry included) claim that this bill is supposed to protect women and girls. This assertion falls flat when we look at Landry's budget slashing: He wants to cut funding to domestic violence shelters by $7 million.

That's in his proposed state budget, set to go into effect on June 1. The *Louisiana Illuminator* Reports: "Domestic violence is one of the largest public

safety issues facing Louisiana. In 2020, the state had the fifth-highest female homicide rate in the country. More than half of women victims that year were killed by an intimate partner, according to the Violence Policy Center. …

"A 2021 investigation by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor concluded the state desperately needed more shelter beds for domestic violence victims. Louisiana's 16 shelters had a total of 389 spaces, while Louisiana had an average of 2,700 unmet requests for shelter beds every year."

So, if Landry and company don't really care about women's safety, we have to look elsewhere in order to discover their motivations. To the point, on April 11 of this year, a House committee struck down a measure to gradually increase Louisiana's ridiculously low $7.25/hour minimum wage and another measure that granted LGBTQIA+ people legal protection against workplace discrimination. (When he was campaigning, Landry told a reporter that he wants to abolish the minimum wage entirely.)

Who could possibly benefit from these actions besides the bosses who would pay zero dollars if they could and who want to keep their ability to fire workers for any reason whatsoever?

This is one very clear reason that the right supports LGBTQIA+ discrimination on behalf of the capitalists. Respecting basic human rights cuts into the bosses profits. In addition, keeping us divided prevents us from fighting back in a united struggle.

Landry is a paper tiger

Mao Zedong famously stated that imperialism is a paper tiger – fierce-appearing but ultimately flimsy compared to the power of the masses. This was dramatically illustrated when Vietnamese peasants and workers defeated U.S. imperialist invaders, the most powerful and technologically advanced military force in history. That's what's possible with unity.

Likewise, Landry may be a paper tiger. His zombie government does not have a mass base. He simply outspent everyone else. Big donors wanted him.

For example, an out-of-state billionaire, Richard "Dick" Uihlein of Illinois, paid $450,000 to flood Louisiana with Landry ads during the election. Uihlein owns packing and shipping supply company Uline, and funds far-right causes across the country.

Apparently he thought Landry was a good investment for people like him, and he's likely right; in month two of his governorship, Landry issued an ex-

ecutive order that corporations receiving tax breaks in Louisiana do not even have to meet a meager job-creation quota, which was the conventional excuse given for the already-outlandish tax breaks.

With his big-money backers, Landry just strolled into the governor's mansion, effectively unopposed by a weak Louisiana Democratic Party that had defamed itself by supporting the abortion ban. He activated his fascist base, but the election still had record-low voter turnout. Only 35.8% of the state's 3 million registered voters even went to the polls, with only 18% of registered voters casting their ballot for Landry.

Meanwhile, there are 4.59 million people in Louisiana, and the vast majority are not rich – far from it. The majority have a stake in fighting the attacks. We just have to figure out how to reach more workers (employed and unemployed). We need to get out in the streets, talk to people at bus stops and laundromats, and anywhere else we can find workers to build this movement.

There's a long road ahead, but we gotta start somewhere.

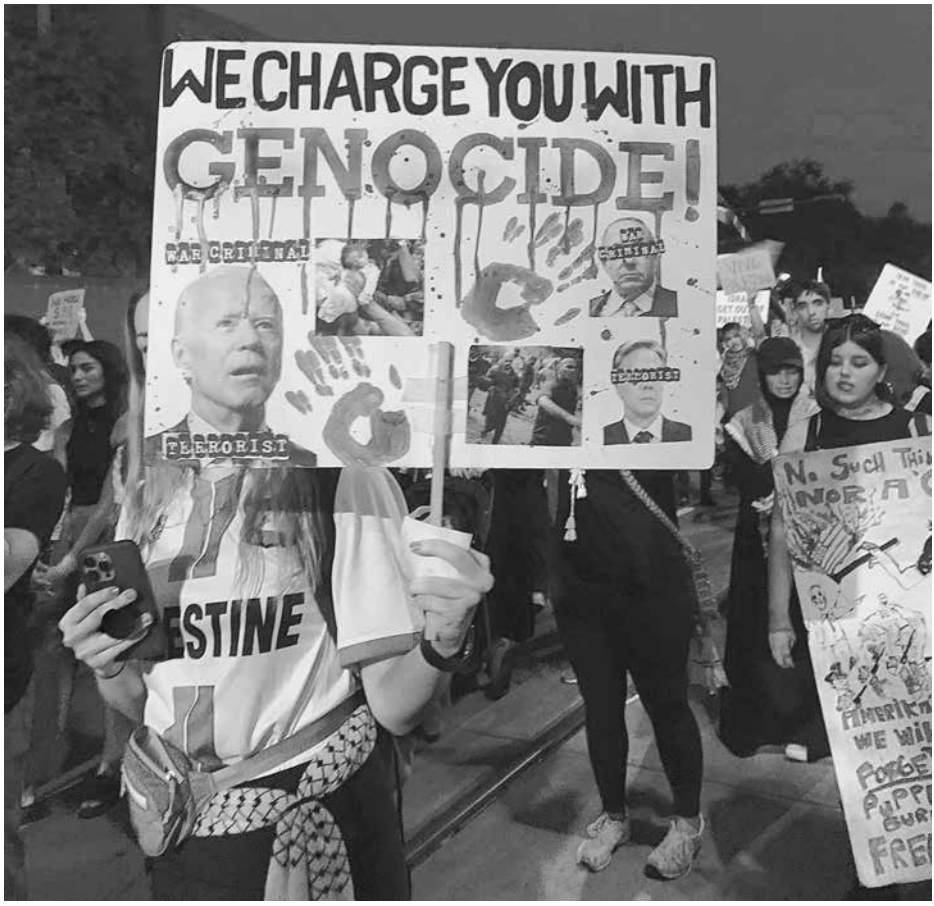
First-ever Northshore Pride

Here is one bright spot on the horizon. The Northshore (that is, the parishes north of Lake Pontchartrain and thus north of New Orleans) is going to have its first Pride parade. It is scheduled for June 1 in Mandeville, and a month of activities are planned to follow it.

This area has been a major focus of struggle in the state. The Landry-aligned, book-banning, Moms for Liberty clones – The St. Tammany Parish Library Accountability Project – caused havoc in St. Tammany. This was ground zero for the Landry movement's street-level assault on queer and trans people.

But throughout it all, LGBTQIA+ and other progressive community members came out in large numbers to council meetings. They showed up at libraries to defend these important public institutions. Queer and trans activist and social groups formed.

Northshore Pride is a result of all that and is hopefully a sign of things to come.



A New Orleans coalition in support of Palestine rallied at the historic African American cultural site Congo Square and marched downtown, shutting down busy areas, including Canal Street on Oct 5, 2024.

From Palestine to Pride: Louisiana Northshore shows solidarity with all oppressed

June 12, 2024

June 1, Mandeville, Louisiana – Despite increasing attacks on the community from well-funded, far-right organizations, the Northshore region of Louisiana held its first-ever Pride Parade this June. Around 500 people marched, and an impressive 2,000 people lined the parade route in the small parish outside New Orleans.

Although Governor Landry and his capitalist backers want to silence and divide LGBTQ+ people and other workers, the people of St. Tammany Parish stood together. They did not back down.

This area has been a major focus of struggle in the state. The Landry-aligned, book-banning, Moms for Liberty clones – the St. Tammany Parish Library Accountability Project – caused havoc with repeated attempts to censor libraries in the parish.

They wrongly believed that targeting smaller suburban communities would lead to easy victories, but the people of St. Tammany rallied repeatedly, coming out in large numbers to council meetings. They showed up at libraries to defend these important public institutions, uniting progressive groups and LGBTQ+ people. From their organizing came Northshore Pride.

A Mandeville parent speaks

A Mandeville home-health worker and parent, Mike Spalt, spoke about this historic Pride event.

> "With last year being my first time marching in a pride parade [in NOLA], I had no idea the feeling it brought within me and everyone I saw out there. It was also my first experience with Queer Northshore.
>
> "So, when I heard they were bringing the Northshore its first pride parade, I offered to help. My family and friends marched this year, and words can't describe seeing our community come together over a common cause.
>
> "Of course, not everyone was on board with the LGBTQ community holding a parade. It's something the queer community has faced since the beginning. The attacks on books, libraries, librarians, and members of the queer community are rooted in ignorant fear. … It doesn't stop us. It moves us.
>
> "I'm really taken aback at how amazing [Pride organizers] Jeremey and Mel organize here on the Northshore. Since the LGBTQ community lives throughout the Northshore, it's time it felt like their home too."

When asked how it feels to be a parent of a queer or trans child when your child is under attack by grown-up bullies trying to score political points, he said:

> "All of that is what inspires my opening line to a parent who has just found out their child is LGBTQ: As a parent, don't be their first bully. They are going to encounter many. Unfortunately, these adult bullies spewing hate for the queer community could be the very cause of their own child taking their own life."

The Trevor Project, a suicide-prevention organization focused on LGBTQ+ youth, reports that "1.8 million LGBTQ+ young people (ages 13-24) seriously consider suicide each year in the U.S. – and at least one attempts suicide every 45 seconds." But, "LGBTQ+ young people with at least one accepting adult in their life report *significantly* lower rates of attempting suicide."

When the right-wing whips up hatred with rhetoric and repressive laws, children die. The purpose of these attacks is to create an atmosphere of desperation for queer and trans people and to scapegoat LGBTQ+ people while the rich strip away every right – from abortion to minimum wage, from lunch breaks for teenage workers to bathroom access – that workers have won in this state, and beyond.

From Louisiana to Palestine, all the attacks are connected

A contingent of around 15 people with Louisiana Allies for Palestine marched in the parade, bringing attention to how the struggle for Palestine is connected to the fight for LGBTQ+ rights. All our communities are under attack, and the spirit of Pride means standing up for everybody. This contingent raised the Palestinian flag, chanting "Free, free Palestine!" with support from the crowd.

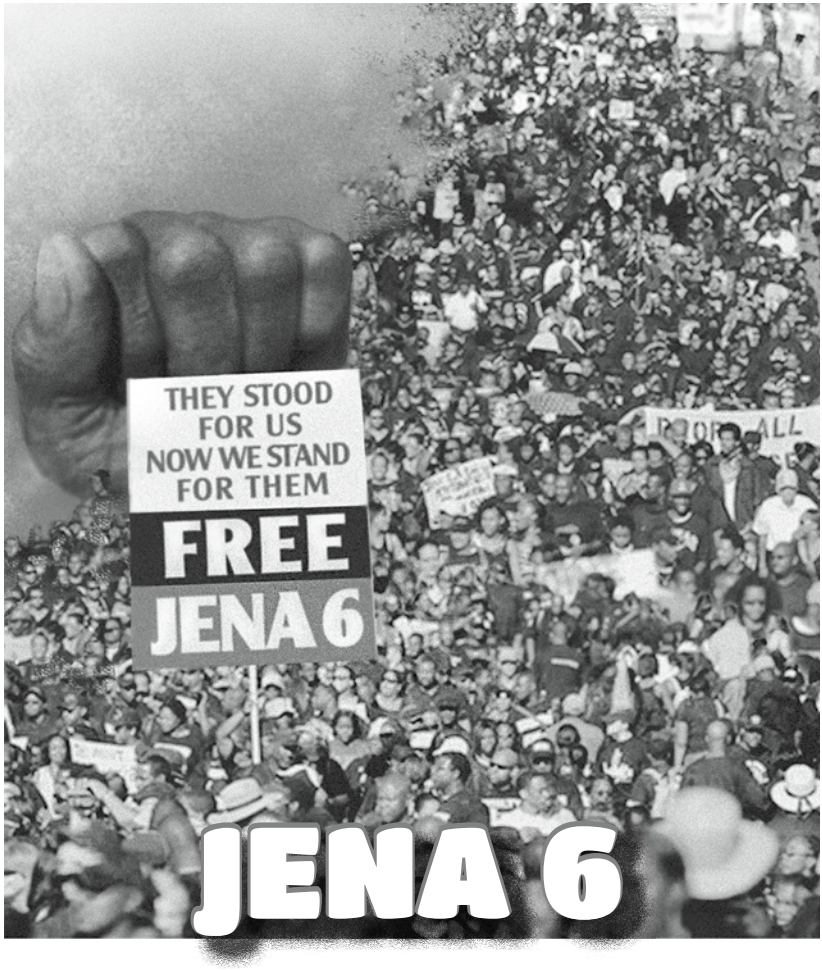
Many watching the march also had Palestinian flags or wore keffiyehs, the patterned scarves that are a symbol of the Palestinian people. One young man with a Palestinian flag painted on his face said, "We can't forget Palestine while we're out here."

A New Orleans-area Palestinian public health worker recently spoke to this writer about how she has experienced the past eight months of the U.S.-Israeli genocide:

> "Think back to the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when people were trapped on rooftops, bodies were floating down the street; people were crowded into the Superdome, babies didn't have formula.
>
> "My life for the past eight months has been like watching that, getting worse and worse and with a far higher death toll. It's a terrible feeling of powerlessness. In the first few days of this horror, I didn't know if my son would make it back to New Orleans. He happened to be back home in Palestine at that time. Thankfully, he was able to leave after a few days, but he was very much affected by that experience."

The same government in Washington that let working-class (especially Black) New Orleanians die during Katrina is the one bank-rolling the Zionist killing machine responsible for around 40,000 deaths in Gaza. They do not care about human life so long as their rich backers are making money, as they certainly are doing in the current war. Many of those same politicians are leading the assault on queer and trans people. But we can take them on if we stand together, just like they did in St. Tammany.

Stonewall was a riot! Free, free Palestine!



December 2024 marks 18 years since the start of the case of the Jena 6 – Robert Bailey, Mychal Bell, Carwin Jones, Bryant Purvis, Jesse Ray Beard, and Theo Shaw.

These six Black teenagers from the town of Jena, Louisiana, were initially charged with attempted second-degree murder of a white classmate after a series of white supremacist events at their high school. Following mass resistance, their charges were reduced to still-serious aggravated battery and conspiracy to commit aggravated battery.

Because of the racism on display in the operations of the legal system, this case sparked one of the biggest civil rights protest movements in the U.S. since the 1960s. Activists marched in cities across the country, including 60,000 in Jena itself.

This movement preceded Black Lives Matter by about six years and set the stage for much of the mass consciousness surrounding Black liberation, policing, and other issues in the period that followed it. White supremacist groups marched in Jena but were outnumbered and drowned out by anti-racist activists, prefiguring the events in Charlottesville, North Carolina, in Aug. 2017, where white supremacists – emboldened by Trump's election – openly chanted Nazi slogans but were vastly outnumbered. Organized fight-back works.

The movement was ultimately successful in securing the freedom of the six. By 2009, Mychal Bell's conviction was overturned. Before a retrial in juvenile court, Bell pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of simple battery. The other five defendants later pleaded "no contest" to the same charge. Beyond the outcomes for these six young men, it is important to reckon with the legacy of the movement, especially in light of Trump's second election and the onslaught of racist attacks he vows to unleash.

For this reason, *Struggle – La Lucha* has republished three 2007-08 articles on the Jena 6 by Black social worker Larry Hales, who was active in the Jena 6 movement in Denver and other cities. We have also published a recent interview with Hales conducted because of the anniversary, as well as an interview with *Struggle – La Lucha*'s Lallan Schoenstein, who participated in the march in Jena. All of this material is included in the present chapter of this book, beginning with the 2007-08 articles,.

In these three pieces, Hales not only sums up the events in Jena but lays out the historical context of lynching and the deep relationship between Klan-type violence and capitalism. This is the kind of history that the right-wing is attempting to keep young people from learning. They would probably like the world to forget the Jena 6 and the mass movement behind them. We have to fight them.

The Jena 6 and the right to self-defense

Larry Hales *Sept. 24, 2007*

> "I don't favor violence. If we could bring about recognition and respect of our people by peaceful means, well and good. Everybody would like to reach his objectives peacefully. But I'm also a realist. The only people in this country who are asked to be nonviolent are Black people.
>
> "Nonviolence is only preached to Black Americans, and I don't go along with anyone who wants to teach our people nonviolence until someone at the same time is teaching our enemy to be nonviolent. I believe we should protect ourselves by any means necessary when we are attacked by racists."
>
> **— Malcolm X, 1965**

Surely no Black person, for that matter any oppressed person, considers the hanging of nooses a prank. Nor should any white person. Such a thing is never done in jest but is a threat of an intended action, a threat meant to control behavior or actions. It is a threat of an oppressor to keep the oppressed in line. The racists who hung the nooses were very clear on what they were doing.

Thousands of Black people have been lynched in this country, extra-legally and legally. There have been numerous studies of recorded lynchings of Black people, especially between 1865 and 1965. There are no really accurate numbers but most historians agree that these numbers range in the thousands, with the largest disproportionate number taking place in the South beginning with the end of Reconstruction.

The lynchings continued even after 1965. In 1981 19-year-old Michael Donald was lynched in Alabama. James Byrd was dragged to his death in 1998 in Texas; though he was not hanged with a rope, this is still considered a lynching.

So a noose is not a benign symbol.

The young Black students, now known as the Jena 6, who sat under the "White Students Only" tree, challenging a racist code at the high school in Jena, Louisiana, took a bold action. Their action is reminiscent of the actions taken by SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and other groups at lunch counters during the Civil Rights era in the South.

When the oppressed resist or defend themselves, the state will seek to crush any inkling of resistance and defense before racist terror.

This is so because racism is a weapon of the U.S. capitalist rulers. The virulent ultra-right racists, such as the KKK or Nazi skinheads, are small. It may be difficult to ascertain their actual numbers, but relative to the actual number of people in the United States, their numbers are very small. Even the Minutemen, racists who have doffed their white robes and hoods, are small in number. They have attempted, but failed, to ally themselves with oppressed nationalities who are U.S. citizens against immigrant workers – to divide the unity of the oppressed.

But, as Sam Marcy, wrote in "*The Klan & the Government: Foes or Allies*": "The financing and the spread of neo-fascist and downright KKK and Nazi groupings is a logical supplement to the legal repressive and terrorist apparatus of the capitalist state in times of need. For that reason, a short-lived perspective in fighting the fascist menace is erroneous."

> Movements don't spring up spontaneously. Marcy also pointed out, "Capitalism is the fountainhead of political reaction in general and of KKK and neo-Nazi terror in particular."

Reaction springs from the system itself. While ultra-right groupings may appear to be on the fringe and isolated, they never disappear and are never insignificant under capitalism. Groups like the Minutemen, in seething chauvinist fits, will try to appeal to the masses in an economic downturn, such as is beginning now, but they exist to confuse workers in general, to divide the oppressed from one another, but ultimately to maintain the white supremacist-dominated U.S. capitalist system.

The events in Jena highlight perfectly the racism inherent and endemic to the system. Many have and will continue to try to minimize the impact of hanging nooses by labeling it as an isolated event or a prank.

Thousands across the country marched in defense of the Jena 6 in September 2007. Larry Hales, on right side was in the Los Angeles Photo Cheryl LaBash

Even in defense of the Jena 6, some may say, "It was just a school fight. Why the ridiculous charges against the six young Black men?"

However, it should be stated emphatically that what the Black youths did was self-defense and that it is the right of the oppressed to defend themselves.

Demonization of Black youth

The state's response is a symptom of the racist in-justice system. This can be seen in the criminalization of the poor, especially people of color. Black people make up half of the more than 2.2 million people incarcerated in U.S. prisons. Add the number of people in jails and on parole or awaiting trial, and the number is over 8 million.

Unemployment in the Black community has been consistently in the double digits and in major cities such as New York can be as high as 50% for young men in their twenties. The lack of health care, education, and other disparities are all glaring in the case of Black people in the U.S. and similar for all the oppressed.

Black people are vilified and Black men in particular are made society's pariah. These are the conditions the Jena 6 – Robert Bailey Jr., 17; Theo Shaw, 17; Carwin Jones, 18; Bryant Purvis, 17; Jessie Rae Beard, 14; and Mychal Bell, 16 – lived with at the time of their arrest.

When the nooses were hung from the tree, history compounded with the nature of racism today. If Jena was and is not a racist place, as some white residents have claimed – all while avoiding the mass march that symbolized an uprising of Black people across the country in response to the Jena 6 case – then the students responsible would have been dealt with by the white residents in solidarity with the Black residents.

This, however, is not what happened. A series of events occurred, including the light treatment of the white students who hung the nooses; the threat by the district attorney to make the lives of the Black students disappear with the "stroke of his pen"; the beating of Robert Bailey; the pulling of a shotgun on Robert Bailey and two of his friends, and subsequent theft charges after the young men disarmed the white person.

Nothing was done. What were the young men to do in the wake of these attacks and threats? What was left to them in a small town that is more than 85% white?

When Justin Barker was attacked for jeering Robert Bailey and calling the young men the "n" word, the young men were standing up and defending their fellow students, themselves, and the entire Black community.

The response of the local state officials was an assertion that young Black men don't have the right to self-defense —that they should cower and hide because the officials already showed they would not act to stop the racists.

The Jena 6 are heroes and should be held in that light, as history will attest. Their actions of defense were for the oppressed of Jena, for the people of New Orleans, victims of police brutality and racist terror. Their actions and the reaction of the state have awakened the Black masses and have sparked an emerging uprising across the country.

It is up to the anti-racist, anti-imperialist movement to lift up the Jena 6. Their freedom must be demanded. All charges should be dropped, and the D.A. should be stripped of his position and license to practice law. And the progressive and working-class movements should affirm and support the right of the oppressed to self-defense.

Jena 6: Slap in the face as Bell sent back to jail

Larry Hales *Oct. 17, 2007*

Mychal Bell

Mychal Bell, one of the six young heroic Black men that resisted racism in the small town of Jena, Louisiana – located in a parish where arch-racist David Duke received the highest percentage of votes when running for president – has been remanded back to jail.

The young men are now collectively known around the world as the Jena 6. Bell, who spent 10 months in jail after a fight with a white student and had been convicted of attempted murder, although the white student received only a few lacerations, had his probation revoked for an old drug charge. The drug charge had never been tried.

His father said: "He's locked up again. No bail has been set or nothing. He's a young man who's been thrown in jail again and again, and he just has to take it."

This is obviously an attempt to demonize the young man, who went to the juvenile court thinking that he would have a hearing but instead had his probation revoked. This latest occurrence is a slap in the face. After more than 60,000 people marched on Jena and tens of thousands marched around the country, awakening the anger and frustration and a spirit of resistance in the Black masses, this can be seen as little else than an attempt to quell oppressed people.

The mass marches beat back the conviction on attempted murder charges, and the court had to throw it out and admit that Bell should not have been tried as an adult. The case, however, is far from over. Bell still faces a conviction for battery, and the five other young men still face trumped-up charges; two of them still must fight charges of attempted murder.

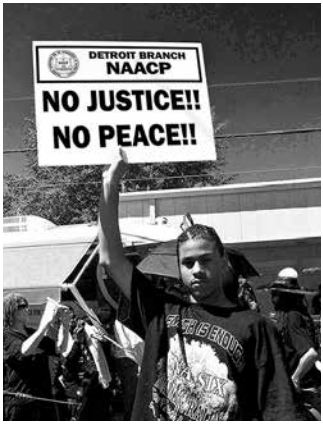
All the charges must be dropped. Though the House Judiciary Committee is slated to hear testimony from Rev. Al Sharpton on Oct. 16, the fight must be kept up. The case of the Jena 6 is a symptom of national oppression and the plight of Black people across the country.

When the government violates the people's rights, insurrection is, for the people and for each portion of the people, the most sacred of the rights and the most indispensable of duties.
FREE THE JENA SIX
PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATION FOR PROGRESS
FREE THE JENA SIX
FREE THE JENA SIX

Protests demanding justice for the Jena 6 sweep the Country in September 2007

Photo: Gloria Rubac

Pam Africa speaking in Philadelphia Photo: Joe Piette



Movement to support Jena 6 confronted racism

Larry Hales *Jan. 24, 2008*

Jena, Louisiana, has not only become a symbol of the willingness of the state – the police, courts, and prisons – to crack down on self-defense from racist threats and attacks. Of late, it is also the latest city to be besieged by ultraright forces.

When the Nationalist Movement announced that it would march on Jena on Martin Luther King Jr. Day "to protest the holiday and the Jena 6," many saw the march's real intentions: to provoke fear in the Black inhabitants of the town and to attempt to use the scapegoating and criminalizing of the six young Black men who fought back against racism to the racists' advantage.

Already, the case of the young men had attracted international attention. Officials claim that Jena is a nice town and that people just want to be left alone. When Black students protested a "white students only" tree, however, school officials ignored their dissent, and the district attorney threatened the youth.

The six endured taunts, racial slurs, and an attack. Two young Black men had a shotgun pulled on them. Instead of charges against the bearer of the weapon, the young men were charged with theft of a weapon for disarming the person.

Nothing was done to address the rampant racism. The hanging of three nooses under the "white students only" tree led to light punishment and no criminal charges, though the hanging of nooses constitutes a viable threat and act of terror. When the men who came to be known as the Jena 6 defended themselves against a white youth who taunted them with racial slurs, they were charged with attempted murder.

The acts of the men and the reaction by city officials sparked a rebellion, as tens of thousands converged on the tiny town of Jena and tens of thousands rallied around the country on Sept. 20, 2007.

Another rally in Washington, D.C., a few months later, drew more than 30,000 people, mostly Black. Many recognized the case as a matter of self-defense of the oppressed and the subsequent criminal charges as a reaction by the state meant to quell inklings of self-defense from the oppressed.

The town of Jena had another chance to redeem itself, to prove that it was not a racist town. The Nationalist Movement decided that not only would it march, displaying its vile, fascistic tendencies, but that it would do so armed.

Jena mayor praised ultrarightist

Jena's Mayor Murphy McMillin had met with Richard Barrett – spokesperson for the ultra-right Nationalist Movement – before the rally on Sept. 20 in support of the Jena 6. McMillin has never denied that he told Barrett, "I do appreciate what you are trying to do," and, "Your moral support means a lot." (Chicago Tribune, Sept. 24, 2007)

The action of McMillin and the district attorney, and many of the white residents of Jena is clear enough. Reed Walters, the district attorney, threatened to make the lives of the Black youth who complained about the "white students only" tree disappear with a stroke of his pen.

Justin Barker, the young white man who got beat up, was paraded around as a victim. He also would later try to mobilize white readers of a white-supremacist website, according to the same Chicago Tribune article.

It is simple to understand the climate of a town like Jena, a town that is 86% white and voted overwhelmingly for racist David Duke when he ran for governor and for the Senate. The Barker family even offered a place for Barrett to stay when he came to town before Sept. 20.

The march of the white supremacists turned out to be small, 15-30 people compared with over 150 counter-protesters organized by the Jan. 21st Committee and supported by many other groups, including the International Action Center and Fight Imperialism – Stand Together in solidarity with the Black inhabitants of Jena.

It is important in any period to drown out ultraright-wing racists and to shut down their message, no matter how small they seem. As Sam Marcy wrote in "The Klan & Government: Foes or Allies," "The U.S. working class should not fall prey to the deadly illusion that the reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan and the growth of fascist violence in widely separated areas of the

country is a fleeting, momentary phenomenon, soon destined to sink into oblivion as conditions rapidly change."

The above was written during the right-wing Ronald Reagan administration, after the Klan marched on a number of cities, including Washington, D.C. – where they were soundly defeated and driven off by a counter-demonstration.

The analysis is critical because, all too often, there are attempts to paint outright fascistic organizations and individuals as on the fringe. These violent, racist ultrarightists operate out in the open, and even during the most prosperous of times, they are always at least one weapon in the ruling class's arsenal aimed at smashing any movement for change emanating from workers and oppressed nationalities.

That the U.S. government, local and state governments allow and even appease organizations such as the Nationalist Movement, asserting the First Amendment as their rationale for granting permits and for providing police protection for the racists from the righteous indignation of counter-protesters, shows not only sheer hypocrisy but is a sign of complicity of the keepers of the status quo.

New Orleans, September 20, 2007

‘You never know when an eruption will occur’

A veteran activist on Jena 6 and beyond

2024 interview with Larry Hales PART 1

Gregory E. Williams: Can you tell us about your political development?

Larry Hales: I’m a social worker working in homelessness prevention and eviction defense.

I’m from the former industrial sector of the country, smack dab in the middle – Erie, Pennsylvania, Lake Erie. As teenagers, my parents moved from the deep South, Mississippi, to get jobs in factories. When my father first worked as a janitor, he and then my mother got jobs in a factory. I’m not sure if either graduated traditional high school. My mother later got her GED. I was born in the ‘70s, both my brothers and I, so we grew up in the ’80s. Our coming of age was after the smashing of the Black liberation movement and all liberation movements in the dark era of the Reagan administration.

I guess it’s hard to put a specific timestamp on deindustrialization because of the tendency to so-called revolutionize the means of production to speed up workers that are left and cast off the others. But in terms of when it hit, I think if you look for a time period when it was on its ascent, the late ‘70s and ‘80s is where it really just started picking up. And that, of course, was a period when Reagan smashed the Air Traffic Controllers union.

So that had a big impact on me growing up with parents working in the manufacturing sector. I didn’t grow up with my mother. She left when I was young. Tried to come back a few times, but I didn’t get to really know her until I was 15 – really get to know her.

They were from the Deep South, and I spent many parts of my summers there. But I grew up with family members working in factories in Erie, Pennsylvania. And my father was a UE member who supported Jesse Jackson in ‘84 and ‘88. Jesse Jackson actually spoke to the union in Erie.

I can't remember if it was '84 or '88, but I remember my father speaking glowingly about that. That had a big impact on me.

And there were these twin calamities that hit in the '80s. When I was a kid, parents weren't pushing their kids to go into the factory. They were pushing their kids to take the civil service exam and become postal workers. That was the big thing. Everyone was telling their kids – Black parents, I don't know what white parents were telling their kids. I think this was because they foresaw that there weren't going to be manufacturing jobs.

At that time, people were being cast off and laid off and factories were being shuttered. This is also right around the time when the U.S. government had made use of the fact (or they allowed, depending on how you believe it happened) that certain communities were being flooded with illegal chemical substances, right? At that time, crack cocaine had hit big. And so you had people in my field who were social workers, who were breaking up families, taking families away. And there was all this pseudoscience about crack cocaine and the people who are addicted to it, and "crack babies," for lack of a better term.

A little bit later, you had the Clinton administration. You had all these bills being passed: the personal responsibility and work authorization bill [editor's note: the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 was also called "welfare reform"]; you had the omnibus crime bill; you had both anti-terrorism bills under Clinton. These things were all happening, and it just had this effect on the Black community with a huge uptick in people being imprisoned. It was a very tough time.

But the one shining light for me was the L.A. Rebellion. That had a profound impact on me. And I had tried to get a rebellion started myself. My brother worked at Chi Chi's. And so I went in, they're like, "You do something." So I said, "We're all gonna rush in there, like you go first." I went in the back door, stole some steaks and some other stuff, and ran out. And I thought everybody was going to start rushing, and it was going to start this big thing, but nothing happened, unfortunately.

But the impact the L.A. Rebellion had on me and seeing the people who could fight like that – that impact set a pretty firm political foundation for me. And it wasn't a straight line. I got in a lot of trouble. Things happened. I grew up. I was a Black Muslim for a while; I was a Black nationalist.

I would say that the thing that really got me formally into politics was going to Palestine in 2002. (And I was in the military before that, from 1997-1998 but was kicked out. Really a medical discharge, a complicated thing. It's a contradiction, right?) And so, after Palestine, I didn't turn back from that point. It started the leftward trajectory. Being able to see the Palestinian struggle and be involved in it to some degree is a point at which there was no going back. Because I saw people that had very little means with which to fight but were willing to use their very bodies; they were fighting because they really had no choice. It was either fight or allow yourself to be disappeared.

And, you know, that, to me: I feel like if Palestinian people could fight with very little, and still be hopeful, and still be able to smile, still be able to enjoy one another's company – all these things that are actually part of resistance because I think the oppressor always tries to stamp that out. But that act in and of itself, being able to love and be loved and to share these quiet moments – personal, intimate moments with people – is an act of resistance. And that, along with the act of physical fighting, to me, is why I believe that it is my duty to continue to fight as much as I can until I'm no longer around anymore.

GEW: When you look at the L.A. Rebellion – in the longer timeframe – it's sort of an island of struggle erupting in a bleak period after the '60s and '70s. And like you said, the country went through Reaganism and deindustrialization. But moments like the L.A. Rebellion really spark something. And I think we're seeing those moments happening in quicker succession in the past 10 to 20 years.

And that's what I'm getting at in my second question: In your writings from the period of the Jena 6 campaign, you put those events in historical perspectives up to that point, addressing the terrible history of lynching, and explaining what these events in Jena really meant. This was when some in the media, and leaders in the town, would try to brush it under the rug. "Oh, hanging nooses in trees is just a youthful prank."

This December, we're coming up on the 18th anniversary of the events that started the case of the Jena 6, which was in 2006. This was a couple of years after Katrina, a big thing for us here in Louisiana. It was several years before Occupy, do you see as the significance of the Jena 6? How does that fit into this narrative of recent history?

LH: I would say that the Jena 6 marked a resurgence of the Black struggle in a lot of ways. Not that it had ever gone away, but I think that it was a start of this new struggle against the repressive state.

My generation, what they call Generation X, at the time when it was young, was probably called the most progressive generation yet. But if you look at people who made up that generation now – obviously there's been two or three generations since then – but the people who I grew up with who were thought to be progressive aren't so much now, necessarily. I think people are like that, you know, because they're dialectical. People are shaped; their ideas are shaped and molded and changing, sometimes contradictory and go back and forth. But I think that if it wasn't for the Jena 6, I can imagine that if it wasn't for that uprising, that struggle, Barack Obama wouldn't have been elected in 2008. I think that he was elected on the back of that uprising. Some people may disagree.

I think that the ruling class at a certain point realized what they needed in terms of the masses of people being excited about that. It came at the right point in history, I guess. And I think in terms of what it meant as far as white supremacy and the growth of white supremacy, I feel like if we go back to 2008, Black people were excited. There were a lot of people who were excited. I think it was one of the elections in this country that had the most participation of people who were of age to be able to participate in the election, if not the most.

But it had a very brief honeymoon, right? It lasted right up until Henry Louis Gates was arrested. And Henry Louis Gates is not progressive by any means in the Black context. He can be counter-reactionary. He's one of those middle-of-the-road academics. But that experience and Barack Obama's response to that, it seems in a lot of ways, led to a lot of liberal white people to basically turn their backs on him (especially middle-class moderate to liberal white people).

And I think that they initially supported him because politically he was actually a moderate anyway. He was more of a Reagan Democrat, as they say. But he also symbolized the hopes and dreams of Black people who never dreamed that they would live to see a Black person hold that position. But right around that time is where we saw the growth of the Tea Party movement and the development of this new, more vocal, white supremacist,

fascistic base that has grown louder and also younger. That has grown in numbers since then, especially under Trump.

And it's something that is a reaction to the growth of neoliberalism and this global competition that opened up, especially with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and more workers able to be exploited by capital, being offshored and shipped out. And so in that destruction and ruin of working-class jobs – good paying jobs with unions and benefits – you got this trend towards reaction, not just in the U.S., but in the whole Western metropole world, the European countries. So you had this growing, which has gotten even bigger, and you have this new reaction to the repressive state growing from the Jena 6. And with George Floyd 14 years later – and not just George Floyd, but with Michael Brown, and all the other instances of police brutality that sparked these mass movements – that may have happened, but I think the Jena 6 and the uprising that happened with the Jena 6 laid the groundwork for this type of response.

I feel that it's not just that there are Black people, and oppressed people, and white folks as well, who are progressive to revolutionary. It's like these two poles have erupted in U.S. society, one reactionary and the other progressive. And I think that going forward, especially with people who are participating in the Palestinian movement, we have to begin to not just engage (revolutionaries have already been engaging), but we have to find a way to communicate the growth of these phenomena to one another and build some type of cohesive movement amongst the so-called revolutionary left, but also be able to engage with these movements. Because it seems as if a lot of times there's this eruption and it doesn't completely go away. And then people get tired because they don't see victories. But we have to use opportunities, things growing and developing to learn from the people involved, but also develop the political consciousness of the people involved. Somewhere in there, I think, is my answer to your question.

GEW: I think it's in there for sure. Thank you. You've given a very good global answer, like putting it in a global perspective. In terms of capital, even – what's happening with the capitalist system.

So, how did you become involved in Jena 6 solidarity? And what movement activities did you engage in?

LH: I found it like a lot of other people. I think it was Michael Baisden's radio show that really broke the news. Then Jasiri X made a hip-hop song about it and a video, if I'm remembering the order of things correctly. That helped spread it. That's where a lot of people found out. And so we had a number of solidarity actions in New York. I wasn't able to go to Louisiana, and I can't remember exactly why that happened, but I was still living in Denver at that time. I didn't move to New York until a little bit later, but we had actions in Denver, of course.

Denver has an interesting history with the Black community and other oppressed communities as well. So I participated in a lot of actions, and I wrote a lot about it and I talked a lot about it and what it meant – the significance of it to the history of the Black struggle, but also the struggle against the repressive state. And I think that some of the victories that we have had in terms of mass incarceration owe to that period in history, that start.

In terms of what it meant to me, well, sometimes even when you're involved in a political struggle, you get sort of demoralized and upset. And then these things like the Jena 6 movement happen – seemingly from out of nowhere – and it makes you believe in the possibilities of people. And you never really know when an eruption is going to occur, but you should always, to some extent, be ready for it to occur. And that was one of those things that was a big shot in the arm, I think, not just to me, but to a lot of people, to say that, yes, we can, in a moment's notice, rise up. And we are very much still aware, just as the rest of society is, of social relations as Black people in this society.

Lallan Schoenstein: Larry, when you were in Denver, I remember you were very involved in the struggle against police brutality, and you were coming under a lot of personal threats. And while you were living in Denver, we were really scared for you.

LH: Yeah, I had my home raided, I think the same year my mother died. It was Nov. 30, 2007. I remember because I was watching the Lakers in Milwaukee. And there was a gentleman by the name of Joe Teague who had been shot by the police, by a parole officer, because parole officers in Denver, like a lot of major cities, carry guns and they have badges. And he had been shot three times, and he had violated and was sent back to prison. And I was

his lifeline on the outside. I was in contact with his mother, and then he paroled out and rolled to my house.

And then one night, it must have been almost 11:00 p.m., 10-12 police officers and parole officers showed up at the door doing the cop knock, which is not a knock, but like just pounding like they're breaking the door down. That ultimately led to me being arrested and jailed.

And there was also a girl, Cassidy, who had her collarbone fractured by a cop who was moonlighting in a parking lot with King Soopers [supermarket], which was part of a mini-mall. We had organized a campaign, and we had boycotted that King Soopers because two security guards who worked there helped that cop. And we basically said, "If they don't respect our community, then we shouldn't shop there." And it was successful. It was so successful that they had a couple of so-called leaders hold press conferences announcing that the boycott was over. These were people who weren't part of it. They took advantage of a woman who was, unfortunately, very mentally ill, and they had her coming around to the rallies saying that I worked for the police. They tried to snitch-jacket me. So they used a number of tactics to try and quiet that movement.

But it was a very tense time. It was definitely a tense time, especially when they raided the apartment. They threw me around the apartment and ripped out my hair, punched me in the stomach and threatened me. And at one point they drove me around the back, behind the apartment building, and I just thought … You didn't know what was gonna happen. I didn't know what was gonna happen. I was like, "This is it." And he's arguing with me, and I'm arguing with him, and I'm like, "Listen, you're gonna do what you're gonna do anyway." So he's like, "Be quiet." I was like, "No, you're gonna do what you're gonna do, but you're not gonna have my dignity. You ain't gonna get me to shut up." My mouth could have got me in a lot of trouble, but I was gonna be in trouble anyway, so I might as well use the one weapon I had, which was to tell them how I felt.

GEW: They used so many tactics of repression against people in the struggle, especially Black people, and we saw that recurring throughout the Black Lives Matter movement in different cities.

LH: A common theme for sure. Yeah, absolutely.

From Jena 6 to Wisconsin State Capitol occupation: struggle transforms people

2024 interview with Larry Hales PART 2

Gregory E. Williams: From my perspective as a white organizer, we try to support movements of racially oppressed people, or nationally oppressed people, to use the Marxist term. In my experience, it can often seem easier for us to just go and participate in the marches, which we need to do. (Getting in the streets is the only way we're going to survive the fascist steamroller that's coming – or is actually already here.) But marching, etc., can sometimes seem less daunting than just trying to have a conversation with a strange white person and talk to them about racism, or even class. And I'm from rural Louisiana. Or even talking to co-workers and family.

One time, I was handing out flyers at a bus stop in New Orleans with a long-time Black organizer in the city – a Black communist. And he said, "are you afraid to talk to white people? Scared they're going to be racist and say some backwards shit?" And I was like, "you know, I guess I am." And he's like, "I'm not afraid to talk to them. Like, what do you think is going to happen?" Now, I'm not talking about trying to infiltrate the Klan! By all means, be safe. Every situation is different, but we were in a group passing out flyers at a bus stop.

I raise this just because, as white activists, we often don't actually do that work of trying to reach other white workers who are prey to MAGA and all this kind of crap. Racism runs deep, and people are subjected to racist lies continually, inundated 24/7 with corporate news and often total disinformation on social media. That's all most people ever hear.

But at the same time, people are transformed by struggle, and it can happen fast. Did you notice any changes, say, in white people – white working-class people, especially – being won over in the course of struggles like the Jena 6 movement?

Larry Hales: One of the biggest moments I've seen in relatively recent history was the seizure of the state capitol in Madison, Wisconsin, in 2011. Wisconsin has a very interesting history, but there were a lot of reactionary bills coming down.

We can follow the trend back to the '90s, for example, with the Bradley Foundation. *[editor's note: a right-wing Milwaukee-based non-profit that undermines public schools by supporting "school choice," just like the ultra-rich Walmart heirs].* I mean, in those days, the amount of money that the Bradley Foundation was putting into political campaigns pales in comparison to what happens now. But at that time, they had W-2, or Wisconsin Works, which was sort of a testing for what became the Personal Responsibility for a Work Opportunity Act. *[editor's note: the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 was also called "welfare reform"]* The Bradley Foundation put a lot of money into the Clinton campaign, even though that act was actually written by Newt Gingrich and his movement.

Newt Gingrich wrote that bill with some of his cronies. But it was very much trumpeted and supported by Bill Clinton. The Clinton administration represented – even though it had been happening over history – but they represented that big shift politically for the Democratic Party on a national level. And so not only that but the whole privatization movement of public schooling. There were a lot of pilot programs in Wisconsin, and the whole myth of the welfare queen and the utilization of that. There were a lot of bad things happening in the corridor to Wisconsin, the Racine, Milwaukee area, which is where the Black population is concentrated. And that represents the beginning of the attack on not just the social safety net, but public monies and public benefits.

And when Act 10 was happening after Governor Scott Walker's election, it was like the white people outside of the corridor area (and even in that area) who had supported these policies realized … I don't know if anyone ever said it, but I feel like this became something that was focused on one population, even though the majority of people who benefit from welfare are not Black, they're white – white women in particular. But there's that idea that these people on welfare are generally Black. They think, "this is some-

thing that Black people are taking advantage of, they're taking your public money, they're taking your tax money, yada, yada, yada."

[Editor's note: the 2011 Wisconsin Act 10 is a bill designed to systematically strip public-sector workers of their rights while cutting pay and benefits. This is the bill that sparked the movement in Wisconsin.]

But when they rose up, I think that those differences, those beliefs began to sort of melt away. Based on what I understand, the conversations that happened – people began to see this as a public attack. It may have started with one population of people, but it was part of this trend. And I think that what it sparked in people, like it woke up our collective imagination of what was possible, even though they ultimately lost. But not only just what's possible but what's necessary. Like, they seized public property and they held it for three weeks or more. And like the whole world just – people from Egypt were paying for pizza orders for the people inside the state capitol.

Lallan Schoenstein: It was magnificent.

LH: Yes, and I think that is one of those moments where people began to see the common cause of the struggle. And there have been others, but the most dynamic one I've seen is that seizure of the state capitol. And I believe that inspiration has to be taken from that. Because – even if we don't say it outright, when we see these moments, these things like the uprising of the Jena 6 – it gives inspiration for what could transpire later. And there have been some great moments. It's almost as if we only think about the losses that we've had. We've had a lot of tremendous losses. There's a lot to be sad about, but there's a lot to be energized about that happened in a very short period of time, too. And I think it was between the uprising in Jena to the takeover of the Madison State Capitol. [editor's note: Activists occupied the Madison State Capitol between February and June 2011].

GEW: So it was a little before Occupy [*which started around September 2011*].

LH: Yeah, it was during a time of the budgeting crises in all the major cities, right? It was the end of the Great Recession, but when things were still kind of picking up, and then I think there were all the budgeting crises. But yeah, that was one of the big moments for me that showed that white people – the white working class – were waking up in their potential to understand the history of the events that unfolded.

GEW: I'm really glad you brought that up because I left Wisconsin out of my little summation. But that was really a pivotal moment. And maybe you could even say the Tea Party – starting with the Tea Party and then Trumpism – that's kind of like the shadow side of that. It's like, what happens when consciousness is thwarted. It's like people going back to sleep – especially white people going back to sleep. And it's not just MAGA. The Democrats have played a role in drawing people away from the struggle.

LS: It's also the AFL leadership of the labor movement and their role. The leadership's very racist. I'm talking about the top echelons who are playing golf with the Supreme Court judges. The labor movement really has to come from the rank-and-file.

The Million Worker March on Washington in 2004 is an example of the Black labor movement rising up from the rank-and-file. We have to mobilize in our own name and try to build something outside of the leadership's collaboration with the Democratic Party.

I mean, I worked for Unite Here!, and I saw firsthand how the U.S. State Department plays a role directly in the top leadership of the unions and keeps things under control.

GEW: Right. We support the unions just like our tendency always supported the Soviet Union because the Soviet Union remained a workers' state. It was a vehicle for workers' power just like the unions are, even if the leadership distorts that vehicle of people's power. Like I said, we support the unions, but it's the political consciousness, the organization of the rank-and-file that's the decisive factor. Having good, fighting leadership is a big advantage, though.

LS: Yes. And the leadership of the labor movement is standing on the backs of the workers. They wouldn't exist if it wasn't for the workers. But on the other hand, if they can keep the workers passive, they can just do all their collaboration machinations.

What happened in Wisconsin had so much potential. It had enormous potential. I mean, I think that the broader progressive movement actually could have gotten more behind it. The left should have been more engaged. And I think that that potential, and what Gregory was talking about during the pandemic – all those strikes, there were thousands of strikes. Every little

borough in the country had strikes for protective gear for dangerous working conditions. I mean, people were using the opportunity. It was giving them something to hold onto to fight back. I think that the labor movement has potential. Wisconsin really showed that. And movement coming from the rank-and-file, and that rank-and-file supporting the struggle for Black liberation; and support for all oppressed peoples, for gay and lesbian and trans liberation, for just the unity, fighting for unity, you know, and against this onslaught from the ruling class.

LH: I was reading "*Message to the Workers of Louisiana*" by Sam Marcy. And I remember David Duke's campaign. *[editor's note: KKK leader David Duke ran for governor in Louisiana in 1991 and lost to Edwin Edwards.]* I was 15, somewhere around there. But I remember that campaign. I obviously didn't know about Sam Marcy. I knew about communism. It was sort of like the monster underneath your bed that they talked about in school. It was like a bad thing, but I didn't know that there was a communist movement in the United States. I mean, leadership. I do remember the *Erie Daily News* running an interview with communist organizers in the '90s. And I do remember being like, "Huh, where are these people? They seem interesting to me."

But I've always felt that there is a way to reach people. I've always been willing to accept some backwardness because I generally think that the working class has backwardness. And what it is just kind of depends, but it's there, and it can't help but be there. I'm not surprised. Even in revolutionaries, there's some backwardness. We have to combat it. But I think that even with some people who vote for Trump, I think he won – not a large percentage – but he did win over percentages of Black and Latino voters, for different reasons, completely. Some of it having to do with how race is viewed in this period in history, just complicated stuff – nationality, things like that.

But it goes back to that question of neoliberalism and the missteps and mistakes that the liberal party has made with people. We have been told for so long that they represent our interests, yet we haven't seen them deliver anything, so some people say, "This is what I'm doing with my vote." And I can deal with that. I can talk to someone like that. I enjoy talking to someone like that because often, people's commitment to some of these backward

things is not strong. Sometimes it is. And even if it's strong, I've always found that when I talk to people, it's not like I'm hitting them over the head with stuff. It's sort of like, "Okay, that's an interesting take, but what about this?"

And, you know, some people react to the elitism of the liberal party and then totally miss the irony of the richest person in history, Elon Musk, being on stage with Trump and part of a movement, and Trump's supposed to be non-elitist. But this sort of contradiction is typical of fascist demagoguery.

But there's a way to talk to all people. And I think that we have to be willing to engage and talk to people. We have to be able to go to these places, people, and converse with them, and converse with them in a way that they feel respected. I might not respect everything that you believe, but I respect you, and I'm willing to listen to how you got there.

And we can talk about that. Because often people got there because of the ravages of capitalism. They just don't see the left as an option. They don't know that it exists. And they feel that the liberal party personifies that elitism, that disdain for working-class people. And so we just have to be willing to deal with that. And I think that opportunities open up when there is something like Madison, Wisconsin. But we have to be able to do it even when something like Madison, Wisconsin, does not exist. And it can be hard. It can be sad. But it's something that must be done.

GEW: You can hear the elitism when liberals talk about Trump, and they call him a populist, and they use the word populist like it's a dirty word. And part of this book that I'm putting together – and what this interview is partly for – is about this history of populism and dispelling the myth that there is a right-wing populism. No, that's fascism. Historically, populism was a progressive left-wing movement with its own contradictions and everything.

But they use it as this dirty word, basically meaning the masses – the unwashed, the uneducated masses. That's how it comes across from liberals. And it seeps into the left movement as well. And we can all fall into that trap of talking that way when we're in this really polarized political environment (really fake polarized because the two options are the Republicans and the Democrats). But like you said, most people in this country have never encountered the left at all. Just like you, I never met a communist when I was growing up, so we have to boldly put communist politics out there, and I believe we can do it without alienating people.

We can talk to anybody on their level. And that doesn't mean trailing behind the reactionary ideas and going along with it at all. We combat that. It's like an inoculation. The people need to be inoculated against right-wing lies. When we go out and talk to people, we know that they're hearing lies about immigrants, and "welfare queens," and trans women, and that kind of thing. We know that they're hearing that and even people in oppressed communities are gonna repeat backwards crap that's being shoved down their throats 24 hours a day. And we have to be prepared for that and be able to bring people over to the revolutionary struggle. That's a tough thing, but it's gotta be done.

LS: It just makes me think of talking to white workers whose personal lives could be completely diverse – even their families could be completely diverse. They love their families. They love their co-workers. They love their friends who could be Black or Latin American or whatever. And then, they'll stand there and say something that they get from the media that is just confoundingly racist. They'll parrot some toxic garbage. It's so frustrating. You want to say, "Reality, check please! You're talking about the people that you love." I'm sure you've all had that experience. It's unbelievable. It's a total disconnect from their personal lives to what they believe they're supposed to think – what they're taught by the media. The constant, constant racism in the media that just drones on every day.

LH: People have a tendency – I was telling one of my coworkers, I said, "You know, when you're driving in traffic, and that person in front of you is driving slow, it feels like they're doing that to you."

GEW: But they don't even know you're back there.

LH: They're just going about their lives. And people think, like, immigrants are doing something to them. They're coming here, they're taking something from me. And it's like, "Okay, what are you really upset about, though? Are you really upset about people who are basically trying to live?" Like this person who's driving slow, they're on a road trying to get somewhere just like you. Immigrant workers are trying to get somewhere to do the exact same things that you do, that you're trying to do.

I mean, it can be a lot to wrap your mind around. It can be a lot, like the town, Springfield, Ohio. And yes, no matter where you are in the world,

when there's a large influx of people to that country, it can be a lot for people to understand and grapple with, and they get anxious, and they're like, "What's going on? And how is this going to impact me?"

Understandable. I can deal with people having those sorts of anxieties, right? And I think that that's where it starts. I can see, okay, it's a lot. But what are you upset with? What's really happening here?

The ways in which people get to the Metropole *[imperialist countries like the U.S.]*, they risk their lives because they don't feel that there's any other choice. It's what President Aristide said: Haitian people are given two options, a quick death or a slow death of starvation. And that slow death of starvation is agonizing because it's not only starving yourself. You're watching your family starve to death. People are willing to risk their lives and risk having a quick death, because maybe I die, but maybe I don't, and then I'm able to save myself and my family from that slow, agonizing death.

So what are we really upset about here? If there is a lack of housing, it's not because immigrants are here; it's because of this system. That's why there's no housing. Immigrants didn't create this system. They're responding to it just like you are. So what are we really upset about here? To my co-worker, I was like, we're not really upset at that person driving in front of us who isn't moving as fast as we want them to move. We're upset because we have so little time to do things because we work until we drop dead. That's what we're upset about.

From the Jena 6 to today:

Ruling class imprisons youth abandoned by capitalism

2024 interview with Larry Hales PART 3

Gregory E. Williams: I want to touch on some of the current situations here in Louisiana. I'd like to get your thoughts on it. It mirrors what's happening in the country more broadly in terms of these intensified attacks and the far right in power.

The Trump campaign, in September 2024, raised furious opposition in Springfield, Ohio when D.J. Vance attemped to incite a racist anti-immigrant campaign against the local Haitian community.

Until the beginning of the year, Louisiana had the only Democratic governor in the Deep South, John Bel Edwards. And he's probably to the right of Biden. He'd been governor twice so couldn't run again. But the Democratic Party here ran a Black candidate, Shawn Wilson, who they did not promote at all. I've never seen an election like it. There was nothing. There was no campaign. And the far right Attorney General Jeff Landry won in a landslide. But this was only a landslide among those who voted, and very few people voted. There's no popular energy around him and he's a MAGA clone. He's like Governor DeSantis in demonizing LGBTQ+ people.

His main shtick is being "tough on crime" and all this racist language. It's not even really a dog whistle. A dog whistle is something subtle. This isn't subtle. This crime hysteria is so racist, trying to make people afraid of Black youth, basically. And one of the first things he did when he came to power in February 2023 was to ram through a special session on crime in the legislature. And there's a Republican supermajority in the legislature, and they just rampaged and they rolled back every little reform that had happened.

Like I said, we had a very conservative Democratic governor before, but there was some criminal justice reform coming out of the Black Lives Matter period. I'd say that's the reason it happened. It was because of the

struggle. So there was some reform, like they were no longer trying 17-year-olds as adults. And Landry's special legislative session reversed everything. They've basically gotten rid of parole. They've approved executing people with nitrogen hypoxia – just horrendous things. And so there's been a big uptick in juvenile arrests.

Some investigative journalism has come out on this. (Richard A. Webster, Verite News) They're not arresting juveniles for violent crimes because, first of all, there is no juvenile violent crime epidemic. There's some violence but there's no epidemic. So what's happening is that they're arresting masses of teenagers for petty things. And now that the 17-year-olds are being tried as adults again, that stays on their record. Even if they're not convicted of anything, that arrest is on their record, and it's gonna prevent them from getting housing, potentially. It's a barrier when they're applying for jobs, for school, and other things. And they're putting tens of millions of dollars into expanding juvenile incarceration facilities across the state. (Julie O'Donoghue, Louisiana Illuminator and Verite News)

And that's just part of it. I'm thinking about this in terms of the legacy of the Jena 6. And all of this is sort of happening now, and there's really no movement. It's at a low point. There's been a Palestine Solidarity Movement, which is good. There is some progressive organizing, but people aren't really in the streets resisting Landry. There's no pushback to speak of, so they're steamrolling everything. And also, his next legislative session is about to start, another special session, which is all about cutting taxes. Well, he wants to cut income tax and corporate tax to help the rich. But he wants to increase the sales tax. That tax burden would be hardest on the working class because it hits everyday purchases. So now he's going to do what he's really in that job to do, which is to help out his millionaire and billionaire friends. [editor's note: these reforms passed]

And he's done it by stepping on oppressed people. He's like climbing over bodies to the top to be able to make it rich. I mean, he's already a millionaire himself through his investments in fossil fuels and this kind of thing. (Hard to trust somebody on the environment when he's making millions from the companies destroying the state.) It's all a huge giveaway to the rich in the midst of intensified attacks on workers. I'm just thinking about the effects, particularly on Black youth. And I'm thinking about this in terms of that

history we've been talking about, the Jena 6 to today. I can't dictate what's going to happen, but as a movement, we need to think through this. What are the next steps?

Larry Hales: That whole idea that there's an uptick in crime – I live in New Jersey, but even in New York there's not an uptick in crime. Maybe the seeming randomness of things. And there are things that can be shocking to people, but things like this always happen to some degree. The only difference is information travels faster. There's always somebody there to record. There's so many cameras. You imagine these things that happen, and then you look at the 11 o'clock news, and then we have this photo of this individual, and they can track that person for 10 blocks. We didn't see this happen, but we see this person walking away, and here he is walking to his door. So I think that's one of the things.

But I feel like whenever things like this happen, they get this infusion of money. It's for the developers of the prison industry. It's for every step that's involved in building something that massive and those who are going to profit from it. But, in terms of people, we had something similar when I lived in Denver, and they were building a new "justice system." It had to actually be voted on. And, you know, they want it. And the way they want it is that they were taking people to see the old county jail and city jail. And the conditions were horrible. I've been in the city jail; it was horrible. You had four people per cell, you had two bunks, and two people sleeping on the floor. I've been one of those people on the floor. But I asked the question, "Why are all these people here? Why do they have to be here?"

We had already been fighting this group that called themselves the Molly Brown Coalition and the Guardian Angels. We've been fighting them because they've been posting pictures of people who they say are drug users or drug dealers and putting them on lampposts all around the city.

We used to go and bust up their meetings. If you advertise a meeting publicly it means it's a public meeting and you can record it. The struggle that we raise is that the city has had an uptick in people being arrested for nonviolent drug crimes. And there needs to be drug treatment for users.

And even when there were violent crimes, well, where are these crimes coming from? At the same time that you're doing this, you're closing down schools in Northeast Denver and turning them into charter schools. You're

closing down parks for children and opening dog runs. It's not that Black folks in these communities don't have dogs, but there are more children than there are dogs here. So why are you closing down children's parks? Why are you closing down schools? And then you're opening up the schools for lotteries, which means anybody from around the city can apply to be in that school. And it's no longer a neighborhood school.

We can talk about the issues of segregation, but when schooling is based on neighborhood schools and you close down those neighborhood schools, children are shipped to another neighborhood and have to take the bus to get there, and their parents have to plan for that. It disrupts everything for everyone. So we raised the people's platform based on the people's needs.

You're projecting that this many people are going to get arrested, based off what? Based off the inability to provide for people's very basic needs. You're telling me there aren't other community-based alternatives to incarceration? That $100 million that you're spending on that can go towards other things.

I read this thing that one of the people said: imagine you're in your home, and your wife and your kid (they always say your wife and your kid) are by themselves in this house, and a 17-year-old breaks in and puts a gun to their heads. This was in one of the articles you sent me about the current spike in juvenile arrests in Louisiana. They create this fear, like this is going to happen to you, therefore we need to rein in these wild teenagers.

It's hard to start a struggle when there is no struggle, but often people are resigned to, like, what can we do? What can we do about this? And I think it often starts with, hey, this is happening, what do you think about it? Would you be interested in coming to a community meeting about this, talk about this, and what alternatives there can be? And sometimes, you know, that can start something big. But yeah, I think it's happening in a lot of places. There's this uptick, even though crime is down, they're still building a bunch of prisons.

I think there's always a way to get to people. Did you ever read Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"?

GEW: I've only read excerpts.

LH: That's the best way to consume it. I find that with a lot of academic stuff, there's a lot of word salad. It's an important theoretical piece on the point at which struggle, education and learning come together but sometimes you get the primary point out of things and that's what is most

important not that you got through the entire book. And I think that's what excerpts do. But that whole idea of joining with and building that dialogue with people and starting from that point. Because I find that often, when it comes to things like this, these types of policy changes and stuff like that, they're the least likely to arouse people's anger and get a movement going.

GEW: Right. Especially until there's a face that they can put on something. You can point to what's happening systemically with the policy. Okay, we know that more youth are being arrested, but sometimes when somebody gets killed – and you can't predict why that particular death moves people so profoundly. It's so horrible that it has to come to that sometimes, but it catches hold and all the anger comes out at one time. There's a deceptive surface quietude in this society. But like we've been talking about throughout the interview, that can be dispelled in a moment and a whole new sequence of struggle unfolds.

Lallan Schoenstein: I think that when violent crimes occur, very often it's within families when there's just too much despair and helplessness. It's not about somebody going out and attacking a person they don't know. It's the anger and despair within a family, which builds up when they're been pressed too hard, where conditions seem to be hopeless. So, the media's characterization of violent crime is a myth created to blame the victims.

But I was also wondering just about the question of opportunities for, say, teenagers – even just having a job, educational opportunities. I mean, what do they see as a possibility for the future? When Landry vilifies and attacks them, it is his cynical solution, "Well, this is a way to deal with them because we don't have jobs. We're not going to give them any educational opportunities." This whole generation of kids coming up has all kinds of potential, maybe even revolutionary potential. From the ruling class point of view, jailing them is a way to deal with them.

LH: It is. And I think that especially non-white, oppressed youth who have less chances aren't given the benefit of the doubt of being a young person. I don't want to conflate one locality with another and why things happen the way they do, but I think we can generalize. When a white young person commits a crime, the system will just look at them differently. And it will just be like, "This was a bad thing." Like the kid who was inebriated and killed a family of four. I don't want people going to prison

for substance addiction or substance use. But history tells me that if that were a Black youth who did that there would not be a plea deal worked out to avoid prison. And no one in the mainstream media would have looked at them sympathetically and just been like, "Oh, well, this was a mistake. He's going to remember that for the rest of his life." And I feel like this is a prison in and of itself. They would be shouting for that person's head.

And so I think that when people visualize crime in the U.S., it's a certain person committing those crimes. They visualize certain types of crimes and a certain person committing those crimes. And they may not even be conscious of the fact that they're doing that necessarily, right? Sort of an unconscious thing. If someone were to say, 20 minutes ago, someone got shot in some part of town, an image is gonna pop in people's minds, right? And then not only that image, a whole history of this person is going to pop in their mind. And the reasons why this person should be handled this way versus another way. And if it turns out that it's not who they thought it was, then what they think should happen begins to shift and change if that person looks different. It's not all the time, but frequently enough.

And we're just sort of conditioned that way. For instance, we're used to thinking that if someone said that we found this new serial killer, the first thing that pops into my mind is a white guy, a middle-aged white guy. So I think when it comes to youth crime, when they're building youth facilities, they're thinking of a certain kind of youth in prison.

LS: And with these mass killings, immediately you think of a young white person who's coming from a very right-wing, fascist family where they've been brutalized – maybe military.

LH: I stereotype that right away, but it's so often the case.

GEW: And I think this is very conscious on the part of the pundits and the politicians who're stoking this stuff. I think it's very conscious for them. When we talk about somebody like Landry, he knows exactly what he's doing. And he knows that when he says crime – and when he says youth crime – he's talking about Black kids. And his super racist base is eating that up. Like I said, they're not the majority because very few people actually came out to vote for him. But they're eating that up. And then other people who aren't diehard racists still have that conditioning, like you said, because we've all grown up with that.

LS: In New York City, every single night on the TV news shows, there's a police blotter report on a crime that's happened in the city. They show a blurry security camera image, where can't see identifing features of an individual. All you see is that it is a Black man – they tell viewers to look out for this Black man. They do it every single night. You can count on it.

LH: Yep, every night, here it comes!

You know, I worked with the homeless population, and my kids asked me – I love talking to my kids, we have the greatest conversations – but they asked me, "Daddy, do you help people?" And I said, "No, not enough at least." And they're like, "Why? Isn't that what your job is?" And I said, well, it's an organization that has limited funds. And often it becomes this chase for funds. And so they're always concerned with data. Data has to say this because we need these funds. And then the whole idea of helping people gets lost in the shuffle. It's about the funds. And I get it, you have an organization, you have payroll, infrastructure, and you gotta pay for these things. But the organization with limited funds becomes the answer to what should be addressed societally, I said.

And we worked with people who oftentimes were mentally ill and chemically addicted, and these things have happened. Yes, there's a part of mental illness that is genetic, where people are genetically predisposed, but it's the interaction of environment and genetics, often. I was like, so what we are seeing is people's response to trauma and hardship, and intergenerational trauma. That's what we're seeing, I said. This society created these conditions that people are responding to and it's not going to be a quick fix. It's not going to be a fix that will happen in this person's lifetime, unfortunately. I wish it would. But knowing that to be the case, there's ways for society to deal with it. And so one of the things people are talking about is this increase in crime. But what are you really upset with here? The city doesn't even have enough psychiatric beds.

LS: I remember in the '80s they closed whole wings of hospitals where people lived who were just on the edge of being able to take care of themselves, or maybe not even, and they just put them out in the street.

LH: And then they warehoused them in jails and prisons. And now that they got rid of cash bail in New York City, and they can no longer warehouse people, people are left to the streets. And everyone's like, "Oh, what

are we seeing here?" And I'm one of those people who say, yeah, it's a lot to take in. Believe me, I worked with a population of people who are unhoused. It's a lot to take in. And people are like, "Well, they're using the bathroom on the platform."

LS: Where else are they gonna use the bathroom, right?

LH: It's the most unsanitary city and people blame the unhoused. If you're worried about people using the bathroom publicly, then you should fight for more restrooms. If you're worried about people being homeless on a platform, then fight for housing. And shelters are not housing. The shelter system is horrible in New York City. Absolutely deplorable. If you think they should just go to a shelter, then you go to the shelter and stay there a couple of nights. See how much you enjoy it. Just because a person is suffering from mental illness, that doesn't mean they can't tell when someone's treating them badly.

So again, what are you really upset with here? What are you really upset about? These politicians like Landry can really turn this around and make it seem as if we need these things and what we really need is something for youth to do, somewhere for them to go, a society where they can feel that they're a part of something.

LS: Recently I heard something on a Zoom call, in a discussion with young people who said that if they were under 18 they couldn't go into a mall or a supermarket unless they were with an adult. I was like, "What?" Then, I went into a local mall and saw the signs all over the place. "You can't be here without an adult." You know, for a young person who doesn't have a lot of resources, a mall may be the only place where they can hang out and see friends. I think this is a new thing that's happening. Now that somebody told me about it, I'm seeing it all over. "You can't be here without an adult if you're under 18." Have you seen that in Jersey?

LH: Yeah, in certain areas of Jersey. Whenever there's something that happens with young people, it's all over the news. They play it up. And then that was the atmosphere that led them to create these rules in certain malls.

GEW: There's nowhere for them to go. If you hang out outside somewhere, you're loitering. You've got to be somewhere spending money, but now you can't go in the mall without an adult.

From the Jena 6 to immigrant rights:

Fight for others as you'd fight for yourself

2024 interview with Larry Hales PART 4

Gregory E. Williams: Is there anything you'd like to add before we wrap up?

Larry Hales: I left out something when I was talking about workers and families. Aside from that question, "What are you really upset about?" *[editor's note: from earlier in the conversation, referring to anti-immigrant, anti-homeless sentiment, etc.]* We need to realize that these things aren't happening in a vacuum. When we talk about conditions – or we're seeing a phenomenon that we're having a hard time understanding why it's happening or what the impact is going to be on us – these things did not come out of a vacuum. It's systemic. And I think people either don't know, or they haven't thought about it because there isn't enough time often. Or sometimes people just don't care and you can't always really do that much about that.

But my father, when he left and said to my mom, "I'm not coming back here," he meant because at that point in history, living in Mississippi was very stifling. This was at the end of the Great Migration, the last Great Migration. There were no opportunities, and you were taking your life in your hands even just going to a store. It felt unsafe to be in Mississippi and to be Black because you didn't know what somebody was going to do, how to respond, and you didn't know how you were going to make your livelihood. And opportunities were in the North to work in the factories.

One of the first books I read when I became a socialist was the "Blast Furnace Brothers" by Vince Copeland. And I used to give that book away as a gift to people. I said, whether you know a lot about politics or you know very little about politics, this is going to have a profound effect on you.

It's a story about when he was working with Black workers who wanted to be in the repair gang because all the Black workers worked in the blast furnace. And the white workers who were in repair gangs did not want a Black person in the repair gang. In fact, Black people weren't allowed to be

in a repair gang. And the person who I'm pretty sure was Vinnie supported that worker getting in a repair gang. And I think Vinnie was ultimately fired and there was a wildcat strike. And it wasn't expected that the Black workers would go on strike for a white worker, but they did. And they were just waiting for someone to tell them.

Part of the backdrop is that, because of the migration that was happening, the white workers in the factories were anxious that these Black workers from the South were taking something away from them. And I think a lot of people fed on that anxiety and it turned into something racist. But we can talk to that anxiety, and we can explain to people that this is happening for a reason. And when it comes to immigrant workers today, they're leaving their homes in large part because of what has been done to them by the U.S.

Not long ago, someone told me a very basic way to talk to workers about this. They said if you're concerned about losing your job because someone is forced and willing to take less, then you fight for that person to get as much as you can. Fight for them to have what you want for yourself. And once you do that, then the bosses have no one left to super-exploit. And that's why you fight for other oppressed workers. Because we want to create a world where you're not the next target. I had left that out earlier, but I think it was important to say. That's part of that explanation for people who have a hard time understanding what's happening with immigrant workers, and they're turned against immigrant workers, and they start taking up these racist lines like they're eating your cats, and they're eating your geese, and stupid shit like that. It doesn't start at the nonsense about eating cats. It starts with the conditions created by capitalism. And we have to talk about those conditions created by capitalism, but also why people would risk everything to come into a country that has done so much harm to them.

GEW: Right, we can flip that script and explain to people that we have the same enemy at the end of the day. Whether we're born here or we're immigrants, our enemy is the same capitalist class – the same imperialist ruling class. In this country, it's the capitalists who are making it to where you can't find affordable housing. But they're also the ones that destroyed the economies of Honduras and Haiti and Venezuela. And that's why immigrants are coming here. So wouldn't it make more sense for us to join with them and fight the ones who are actually screwing us over?

LH: I try to engage with my daughters politically. You know, they're pro-Palestinian. One used to draw all these watermelons for Palestine. And I remember my other daughter said to me once after George Floyd was killed, "Daddy, are the cops going to kill you?" That was 2020, so she was like seven then.

I said something to the effect that we want a society where we don't have to worry about that. So she asked me, "Daddy, is race a real thing?" She's seven. I said race changes. The whole idea that there's this thing of race that is always this, always this, I was like, that's not true. Irish people used to be thought of as a different race from the British. Italians used to be thought of as a different race from the so-called nativists in the United States.

I was like, so it's not a real thing, it shifts and changes based on what people in power need it to be. As for our idea of race and the Black race, I was like, there was a little event called Bacon's Rebellion a long time ago. [a 1676-77 armed rebellion in the Virginia colony] There were white indentured servants, which is a form of slavery where people sell themselves for passage to the colony. And there were Black people who were captured. And there was a commonality in that shared circumstance.

And that ended at a certain point, and then race became a thing that was written into law. Not necessarily as in Black and white, but the fact that if you were Black and you were born into slavery, you would exist in slavery. And there was no way to get out of it. There was no period of time in which you ceased to be a slave like there were for indentured servants. You were just a slave. You were enslaved, I should say, not a slave. So I said to my daughter, we want to fight for a world where there's no idea of a white person, of whiteness. I was like, and Blackness is the opposite of whiteness and how race is viewed in our society.

And the pride that we hold in Blackness is different from the pride that a white person holds in whiteness. That pride in whiteness is a pride in what your whiteness gets you. The pride in Blackness is a pride in the resistance of that Blackness and the struggle against whiteness. I said eventually they will both cease to exist. It's not real and at the same time it is real. It's only real because of history, but it's not scientific otherwise.

Jena showed necessity of class-conscious unity against racism

A 2024 interview with Lallan Schoenstein, who prepares the "Struggle for Socialism – La Lucha por el Socialismo" magazine for publication, is a labor union activist and retired child care worker. She's also a graphic designer who works on books, like one for the Million Worker March Movement.

Gregory E. Williams: Can you say a little bit about how you ended up traveling to Jena to support the six?

Lallan Schoenstein: For me, starting in the 1960s, the struggle against racism was powerful and created hope for a profound change. There was the Civil Rights Movement, the liberation struggles in Southern Africa as well as many anti-colonial victories. When the militant organization of the Black Panther Party faced crushing violence by forces of the state, it laid bare the role racism played in blocking social progress.

It could be seen that the driving forces of reaction in the capitalist system were the tactics of divide and conquer, of keeping society segregated by falsely blaming the most oppressed for the ever-present threat of joblessness, homelessness, and deprivation.

In 2006, the attack against Black high school students with a display of nooses in Jena, Louisiana, woke the whole country to the residual horrors of the slavocracy. There were protests in many cities. In September 2007, there was a huge march of African Americans in Jena while thousands across the country protested. It should have settled the issue. It didn't. Maybe the outrageously unjust legal accusations and threats of prison sentences on the courageous Jena 6 Black students were somewhat alleviated.

Then, in 2008, when the protests subsided, there was a backlash that arose with the ugly face of the KKK. The white supremacists planned to march on Jan. 21 on a vulnerable Black community in a small rural town, purposefully desecrating Martin Luther King's Birthday. They even won a lawsuit to march without a permit while carrying nooses, white cross flags, and even firearms.

GEW: What types of forces from the movement did you encounter?

LS: It felt crucial to join in with the diverse groups of students and union

Protesters gather before an anti-KKK rally and march in Jena, Louisiana, in 2008.
SLL photo: Lallan Schoenstein

members who were organizing to gather in support of the action of anti-racist activists in Jena. We came from Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, New Orleans, Atlanta, Jersey City, N.J., and Durham, N.C. to block the Klan.

GEW: What was it like in Jena?

LS: At the rally, an ominous procession of big SUVs and police cars circled the local park. An organizer from Jena told us that "we have been harassed by the police, pulled over, and ticketed almost every day."

Following the rally, where Black liberation leaders, anti-police activists, and community organizers spoke, a group of over 150 of us marched from the park to the courthouse where the white supremacists planned to hold their rally. Around 15 of them rapidly dissolved into a wall of police. Together, they attempted unsuccessfully to intimidate our march. We chanted: "No Nazis, No KKK, No Fascist USA!"

The people of Jena did not come out in support of the white supremacist rally. Instead, Black and white gathered along the route, many in solidarity with the anti-racist protest.

GEW: What is the significance of Jena?

LS: The events in Jena occurred in a rural part of the Deep South. Currently, it would appear that many areas like this are captured in a right-wing current. To think so would be to overlook the depth of complex social structures.

Racist bullies can whip up a superficial flood of malfeasance, especially when they are backed by the wealthiest bosses in whose interests they perform. No doubt they are dangerous. It's important to keep in mind that real social change can only come from the class struggle against oppression. Jena showed how class-conscious unity against racism was needed then and now more than ever

Grand Dragon David Duke presides over Klan

Elon Musk posted puns on X such as “Bet you did nazi that coming.”

Straight line from David Duke to Elon Musk's Nazi salute

Revisiting the fightback against David Duke's gubernatorial campaign

David Duke is a neo-Nazi peddler of conspiracy theories who ran for governor of Louisiana in 1991. He was the "Grand Wizard" (national leader) of the Ku Klux Klan from 1974 to 1981. Running as a Republican at the end of Reagan's presidency, he was elected to the Louisiana House of Representatives, where he sat from 1989 to 1992.

In the 1991 campaign, Duke half-heartedly attempted to distance himself from Klan politics, claiming to be a born-again Christian who repudiated his past affiliations. Nevertheless, his campaign was filled with racist dog-whistles like the demonization of "welfare queens," and he spoke of representing the "white majority." This surely emboldened his die-hard racist base while – in classic fascist style – he attempted to appeal to broader sections of the population who were tired of being treated like trash by establishment politicians. (In subsequent years, he gave up any pretense that he wasn't a Nazi, openly spewing Holocaust denial and other racist lies.)

Duke made it through the gubernatorial primary, coming in second to Democrat Edwin Edwards, the last Louisiana governor in the Huey Long tradition. Duke ultimately lost to Edwards, but progressive people and revolutionaries around the country recognized the danger of Duke's campaign, whether he won or not, as this campaign normalized fascism. In retrospect, it was a precursor to Trump's MAGA movement. We can trace a straight line from Duke to Elon Musk giving a Nazi salute at Trump's 2025 inauguration. There's also a line going from Duke to Louisiana's current racist millionaire governor, Jeff Landry.

Following are two historical pieces by U.S. Marxist leader Sam Marcy. The first is a newspaper article in which he makes a broad appeal to Louisiana's working class. He calls on workers of all races and nationalities to reject Duke, based not solely on moral grounds but on their shared class interests; whatever they may say, fascists like Duke and Trump always represent the ultra-rich, often while outright defrauding their supporters (Duke infamously pleaded with his supporters for money, claiming to have fallen on hard times while using the money for gambling).

The second is another newspaper article, this time putting Duke into historical perspective as a truly fascist figure bent on rolling back all the people's gains in a period of capitalist crisis. Marcy explains what was truly new about Duke's campaign. He argues that even if the racism was the same old, same old espoused by segregationists George Wallace and Lester Maddox in the Civil Rights era, Duke was more dangerous because the 1960s and '70s were a very different period politically from the early 1990s.

Marcy says:

> "In the 1960s, when both Maddox and Wallace were trying to become national figures, their type of all-out, segregationist racism was basically *defensive* [emphasis added — GEW]: They were trying to hold onto white supremacy as it had existed for a century; they were trying to retain the status quo of racism. At that time, there was an upward, progressive movement throughout the whole country. …
>
> "In contrast to the present, it was a progressive era. …
>
> "The Duke movement is not just a defensive attempt to halt the progress of Civil Rights. It is a wholesale offensive to undo and reverse the historic gains made by the Black and other progressive forces.
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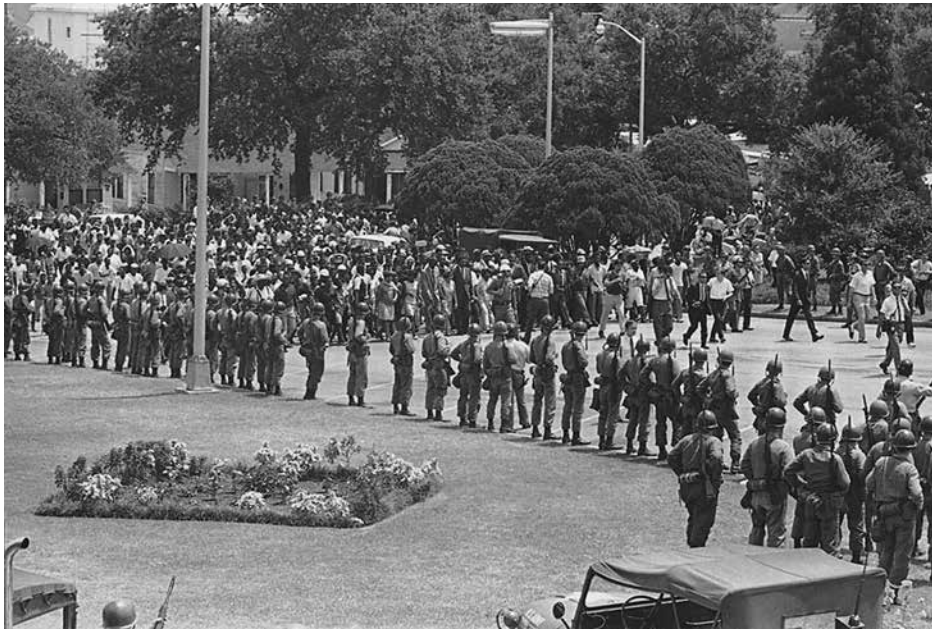
> "The Duke campaign comes in the midst of an anti-labor offensive. Gains made by the workers have been crumbling; the capitalist recession and the attacks on the living standards of the workers have brought frustration and anger. The labor movement has been forced into concession after concession. Strike breaking and scab herding are on the order of the day.
>
> "The situation is ripe for a fascist demagogue to prey upon these frustrations, especially among the middle class who are losing their moorings to the bourgeoisie."

In 2025, most of the progressive gains of the past centuries have already been reversed. We are in a deeply reactionary period, with economic conditions rapidly deteriorating and staggering inequality being the order of the day. The situation now is truly ripe for fascist demagogues, as Marcy said of 1991.

With the disaster of Trump's second term upon us, it is a good time to revisit the fightback against the Duke campaign. Readers can judge for themselves whether Marcy's words are still relevant. Our view is that they are. In fact, the rotten conditions of that period have only gotten worse. Our situation today is drastically more dire. The capitalist-imperialist system is in a much more advanced stage of decay, while capitalist governments around the world are throwing off the liberal-democratic shell like an old skin. The best answer will be a massive, unified movement.

– Gregory E. Williams



In 1967 The Bogalusa Civil Rights March arrived at the Louisiana Capitol, after a 10 day trek with National Guard lining the street. The 105-mile march from Bogalusa to Baton Rouge was a protest against the racist riegn of terror by the Louisiana KKK.

Students from Booker T. Washington High School in Shreveport, Louisiana running away from a cloud of tear gas on Sept. 23, 1963.

Photo: Langston McEachern photographs, The Shreveport Times Collection, Northwest Louisiana Archives, Louisiana State University Shreveport.

Message to the workers of Louisiana

Sam Marcy *November 21, 1991*

If you are one of the million or so workers in Louisiana, you may be thinking of voting for David Duke in Saturday's gubernatorial election.

As a worker, you have much to think about these days. Almost everybody agrees these are hard times. Some people say that the depression now hitting this country began ten years ago in Louisiana.

As a worker, you are concerned with your own livelihood and standard of living. If you have a family or dependents, you surely are concerned about them.

Hawks' resignation from Duke staff

You have probably heard that Bob Hawks, the state coordinator of the Duke campaign, resigned the other day and blasted Duke. Some say Hawks was an agent for the Edwards campaign working to undermine Duke. Others say he's a rat leaving a sinking ship.

Whatever the case may be, Hawks raised the religious question. He accused Duke of not following the path of Jesus and said he hadn't seen him read the Bible or go to church.

Now, religion should have no place in this campaign. The religious beliefs of any person, whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu or whatever, should be considered a private affair. The Constitution prohibits state promotion of religion. This is a political campaign, not a religious one. Throwing it into the campaign diverts attention from the main and fundamental issues, which have to do with the economic, social and political problems in the state of Louisiana.

Corporate letter-writing campaign

You might have received a letter from your employer urging you to vote against Duke. Quite a few companies have been sending such letters to their workers:. Stewart Enterprises, the Lamar Corporation – we don't know who else, but Business Week magazine of Nov. 18 says many.

It is a violation of the Constitution and Labor Relations Law to tell workers how to vote, either in union elections or in political campaigns. Of course, many workers who know the anti-labor record of the companies they work for are suspicious when their bosses suddenly go on a media campaign against Duke. Where have they been all this time? And why right now?

The way they're talking now, you would think the gas and oil would evaporate and the Mississippi River dry up if Duke's elected. However, these bosses might just as quickly change their minds the day after the election and embrace Duke in the same way the German industrialists and bankers supported Hitler.

These are questions we have to keep in mind when these bosses – and some are the most greedy when it comes to wages and working conditions – suddenly become knights in shining armor urging us to do battle. Whatever their motives may be, it has nothing to do with our own interests as workers.

Every worker ought to question their motivation. It has always been how to get profit out of their enterprises by taking our labor and giving us in return as little as possible.

So let's not speculate on what their motives may be. Let's examine David Duke independently of what they say and consider his candidacy from the point of view of our class interests as workers.

David Duke has been a state representative long enough that he should have been able to clearly and simply address the burning issues facing Louisiana. These are: joblessness, health care for the hundreds of thousands who have none, and the growing poverty which is 20% above the national level.

Yet he has introduced no bill, made no speeches, nor raised as much as a whisper in connection with these very profound issues.

Rich state, poor people

David Duke has avoided addressing the most important question of all. That is, why should this state, which is so rich in natural resources, have so many poor people? And why should you as a worker have to worry about your job?

Louisiana is not poor. It has one of the greatest natural resources in the world – oil. It also has another important source of energy – natural gas. It has a big petrochemical industry.

Its fertile soil provides a rich variety of agricultural products that are shipped to all parts of the world. Its forests yield lumber and paper products. Off the coast are rich fishing areas.

So why is life becoming more and more difficult?

Consider one thing which Duke never seems to mention. Whether you make your living as a wage worker or as a professional, your income level is lower than that for comparable work in almost all the Northern, Eastern and Central states of the United States.

If you are a public school teacher in Louisiana, you earned an average of $21,280 in 1987. But a teacher in New York state got $32,620 in that same year (World Almanac, 1988).

Wages have gone up a bit since 1987 but the differential is still about the same. That's a fact, and facts are stubborn things.

This kind of differential in pay between Louisiana and other states holds true not only for teachers or other professionals but for all workers.

Some may say, and properly so, that wages in Louisiana are better than in Mississippi, Arkansas, or other states of the old Confederacy. But that only helps to make the most important point.

Why should the Southern states have lower wages than the rest of the U.S.? It's not because of geography. It's history that makes the difference.

Jefferson and slavery

Take the case of Louisiana, which became a state in 1812, nine years after it was purchased from France during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson was considered one of the most enlightened people of his day, especially in France where he served as the U.S. representative. He was a writer and thinker, a scientist and statesman, and the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence with its famous line about "All men are created equal."

Yet Jefferson as President of the United States purchased the vast Louisiana Territory, which had been the home of Native people for thousands of years. And instead of taking an enlightened and democratic approach to this territory, Jefferson, a slaveholder himself, was most interested in extending slavery there.

Many think that the mass of the whites were made better off by the enslavement of Black people. But it isn't true. The enslavement of great num-

bers of Black people made a few whites rich and powerful. But the white workers never got anything from slavery to benefit them historically. Far from being lifted above the ordinary workers in Detroit, Cleveland, Los Angeles or Philadelphia, the white workers in the South have lagged behind the rest of the country. The idea that white workers were helped by slavery is a myth.

1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Photo: Warren K. Leffler, Library of Congress

Of course, there may be some sick psychological satisfaction in being free while others are forced into involuntary servitude. But the upshot of it is that the standard of living of workers in the former states of the Confederacy has never come close to that of workers in the Northern, Central and Western states. Today, more than 125 years after the bloody Civil War, which cost the lives of so many people and finally resulted in the abolition of slavery, workers in Louisiana must still grapple with this problem.

Who's Duke against?

Now comes David Duke, who is running not just against Edwards, but against the Black people. That is what is firmly implanted in the minds of the electorate as Saturday approaches.

But that is not the whole truth. What he carefully conceals is that he is running against the working class as a whole, Black and white.

Duke's slick and well-publicized campaign shows that he's not just an individual. Who's behind him? At first he said he was for the "little people." Now he claims he has letters of support from some of the biggest monopolies, the billionaires, although that has yet to be proven. It is known for sure, however, that he gets a lot of money from millionaires on the far right.

Signs demanding basic rights carried during the August 28, 1963 March on Washington.
Photo: Marion S. Trikosko, Library of Congress

(Don't forget, a billionaire has a thousand times as much as a millionaire!) But either way, he is proving himself very useful to the big monopolies.

This is a time when mass anger could very easily focus on the big corporations and banks as they throw workers into the streets and the economy goes into a tailspin. Duke is helping big business by diverting attention away from those responsible for the economic disaster and blaming everything on the poorest people

You have heard that Duke used to openly praise Hitler and was selling Nazi literature from his office just two years ago. Hitler, too, directed the anger and fear caused by the 1930s depression away from the biggest bankers and industrialists. He organized a movement that destroyed the progressive and labor movement in Germany, using racist oratory to whip people up. But like Duke, at the beginning of his career Hitler tried to look anti-establishment. He talked against the international bankers, claiming they were part of a so-called Jewish conspiracy.

That didn't stop the biggest German bankers and industrialists from eventually coming in behind him. They needed a Hitler, with all his violent and totalitarian methods, to save their system of capitalism. Eventually, all he had to offer was a monstrous war that ended in smoldering ruins.

Now, in Louisiana, Duke is trying to build a similar movement. And what is its objective? Not to help raise wages for all working people, or guarantee their job security. It is to reverse the entire period of the last 40 to 50 years, when gains have been made not only in civil rights but in union organization, in women's rights, in education, and in social reforms generally. Many of these gains have been under attack since the late 1970s. But Duke wants to sweep them all away.

One of David Duke's most vicious arguments concerns, of course, the question of welfare. He gives the impression that Black people and other minorities consume a great portion of the state budget and that if they were penalized, this would help reduce the budget.

In one form or another, this same argument has been put forward in almost all the states. The more rabid politicians make it a principal point in their election campaigns, calling people on welfare free loaders, parasites, and so forth.

But who really gets welfare in this country? Who gets the billions and billions of government funds? Not poor people. The ones who devour huge sums from the federal and state budgets are the giant corporations! They've been living on welfare all the years of their existence. Almost all of them are subsidized in one form or another. During the Reagan years, their subsidies came in the form of huge reductions in taxes. It got so ridiculous that some giant oil companies paid less taxes than a working class family!

In addition, they get special financial benefits through grants for research and development and other forms of hidden subsidies. This is particularly true for military contractors, especially those in aerospace.

Russell Long on corporate welfare

Nobody was more eloquent in describing how big business has brought about the real welfare system in the United States than the former Majority leader and whip from Louisiana, Senator Russell Long. In April 1967, he told the Senate:

> "Most campaign money comes from businessmen. ... Many businessmen contribute to legislators who have voted to exempt their businesses from the minimum wage. Businessmen contribute to legislators who have fought against taxes that would have been burdensome to their businesses. ... Power company officials contribute to legislators who vote against public power. ... Bankers, insurance company executives, big moneylenders generally contribute to legislators who vote for policies that lead to high interest rates.

> "Many large companies benefit from research and development contracts which carry a guaranteed profit. ... In recent years, quite a battle has developed over the desire of government research contractors to obtain and keep lush private monopoly patent rights on those things discovered with billions of dollars of government research money. The possibility of windfall profits in this area defies imagination. ...
>
> "Drug companies are often able to sell brand-name drug products at anywhere from twice to 50 times the price of identical nonbranded products for welfare and Medicare patients. ... Executives of drug companies will contribute to legislators who vote to permit or bring about such a result.
>
> "Executives of regulated companies contribute to legislators who vote to go easy on the regulation. ...
>
> "Many industries are subsidized. This includes the merchant marine, the shipbuilders, the sugar producers, the copper producers, and a host of others. ...
>
> "This list is merely illustrative; it could be elaborated upon and enlarged to include many more." –"The Rich and the Super-Rich" by Ferdinand Lundberg.

All this welfare for the rich corporations that run Louisiana! But has Duke ever told it like it is? Has he ever tried to mobilize the workers against these rich corporate criminals who thrive off government welfare?

White workers and affirmative action

In addition to welfare, Duke harps on affirmative action. As he tells it, whites are being penalized because the law now requires that Black and Latino workers who have faced past discrimination should be compensated affirmatively in promotions.

There's no reason that affirmative action has to hurt white workers. The discrimination in the past was the result of the policies of the bosses. They instituted discrimination in the workplace and they should pay for it.

Are there ways to erase racial discrimination in the workplace without taking it out of the hides of white workers? Take the matter of promotions. Say a white male is entitled to a promotion from labor grade 2 to labor grade 3, but a Black (or woman) worker with less seniority is now eligible for the job because of the law on affirmative action. The worker who would have gotten the job on the basis of seniority should also get an equivalent pay increase. That way the worker isn't penalized because of the past discriminatory practices of the company.

There can be many other approaches to make sure that affirmative action doesn't hurt any workers. It is a pity that the labor movement has gradually

acquiesced to a half-way measure regarding affirmative action which puts the burden on the workers. It leaves the labor movement open to vicious racism.

Extended jobless benefits

Duke doesn't address the question of why Louisiana pays out so little in unemployment benefits when so many are out of work. Unemployment insurance isn't just a federal program, like Social Security, it's a federal-state system

Wouldn't this be an opportunity for Duke, if he really was for the workers, to demand a state extension of benefits? This is particularly important in a state like Louisiana where the crisis has lasted so long that benefits have run out for hundreds of thousands.

Living in Louisiana, you have seen periods of boom as well as bust, especially in the oil and gas industry. The boom periods made the powerful corporations much richer, more aggressive and predatory. But have they left the workers any better off?

Louisiana has the resources to be one of the most self-sufficient states in the union. Instead, it has become more dependent on what is happening to the economy, not just nationally but even globally. Why is that?

If all the natural wealth of Louisiana were being utilized to provide for the needs of the residents of the state, there wouldn't be any problem. But that's not what's happening. Everything is produced in order to make a profit. When the profit system goes bust, the most significant section of the population, the workers, are left helpless.

But the workers don't have to be helpless. We're the majority of the population! If we get together, we can be tremendously powerful. We have the ability to stop everything from moving, as can be seen in other countries when workers go out on a general strike. Certainly, the big bosses are aware of that, and will do all they can to prevent the workers from getting any ideas.

That can mean throwing their weight behind a demagogue like Duke in order to get him elected, so he can channel everything into a racist struggle.

What is needed in Louisiana, as elsewhere, is a change in the relationship between the working class and the capitalist class. It is necessary for the working class to take hold of all the natural resources and means of production and use them for the interests of society as a whole, not for a handful of millionaires and billionaires.

Voting against Duke will help open the road to such a development.

Perspectives on the Duke campaign

Sam Marcy *NOV. 14, 1991*

The gubernatorial election in Louisiana is not just a referendum on racism. Of course, racism is the principal issue. But there is much more to it. To understand this struggle, you have to go beyond the external features of life in this important Southern state.

To many throughout the country, Louisiana is New Orleans, with the exciting night life and Old World charms of the French Quarter. It is the colorful Mardi Gras. But there is another Louisiana.

The other Louisiana

It is the Louisiana of the giant oil refineries, the modern petrochemical plants, and the many metal foundries. Thousands of Black and white workers keep these industries going and depend on them for their livelihood. There are many more workers in the sawmills and paper plants. Still others produce salt and sulfur, which are marketed all over the United States and beyond.

Many thousands of laborers still work in the cotton fields, grow rice and soy beans, raise cattle, and have made Louisiana sweet potatoes a staple throughout the whole country.

But besides being a great producing state, Louisiana is also a vast battlefield between the working class and the absentee millionaires and billionaires who control all the vital arteries that make it so productive. And now the capitalist recession has sharpened these class antagonisms.

The ruling class, in its effort to avoid taking responsibility for the deteriorating economic conditions of the workers, Black and white, has picked up a demagogue, one of the most venomous in Southern history. They want David Duke to divert the class struggle into reactionary, racist and anti-labor channels.

Lester Maddox

The earlier racist endeavors of the ruling class have to be taken into account in order to put the Duke adventure into proper historical context.

What are the specific characteristics that distinguish the current campaign of David Duke from those of Lester Maddox of Georgia and George Wallace of Alabama in the 1960s? Both were openly racist candidates supported by and associated with the Ku Klux Klan. And both got elected as governors.

Lester Maddox, elected governor of Georgia in 1966, was regarded in the rest of the country as no more than an oddity, an old-fashioned type of arch-segregationist. He made segregation the centerpiece of his campaign. A restaurant owner, he had achieved national notoriety a few years earlier when he stood in the door of his restaurant with an ax handle and said he'd physically drive away any Black person who tried to enter. He deliberately closed his establishment rather than desegregate it.

This got him the support of arch-segregationists in the state's ruling circles, who pushed his campaign for governor. However, from a national point of view, Maddox never was a significant political figure outside Georgia and its immediate Southern environs.

Because Maddox couldn't succeed himself as governor, he ran in 1970 for lieutenant governor and was elected along with Jimmy Carter, the new governor. Trying again in 1974, he lost the primary election, thus ending his racist career. An appeal to outright racism was proving inadequate to stop the advance of the civil rights movement.

Photos: Matt Herron

Mrs. Aylene Quin of McComb, Miss. went to the Governor's Mansion in June 1968 to protest arrests of voting rights demonstrators. Here, Mississippi trooper Huey Krohn attacked five-year-old Anthony Quin.

George Wallace

His career bears somewhat of a kinship to that of George C. Wallace, who got even more national attention by defying the order of the federal government to desegregate the public schools of Alabama. This came after the civil rights movement had reached a truly massive scale. Wallace, then governor, got widespread publicity when he stood in the door of the University of Alabama to bar the entrance of African-American students. But he finally capitulated in the face of federal troops sent in by President John F. Kennedy.

Wallace created the biggest stir on the national level when he entered the race for president in 1968, again on a program of preserving white supremacy.

It was no accident, then, that David Duke, in a Nov. 2 television debate, managed to interject the names of both Maddox and Wallace. Did he want to show that both men were linked to the Klan but got elected anyway?

What makes Duke different?

However, there are important differences between David Duke and these earlier racist politicians. What most distinguishes their careers from his is that they operated in a very different epoch.

In the 1960s, when both Maddox and Wallace were trying to become national figures, their type of all-out, segregationist racism was basically defensive: they were trying to hold onto white supremacy as it had existed for a century; they were trying to retain the status quo of racism.

At that time, there was an upward, progressive movement throughout the whole country. The civil rights and liberation struggles had started in the 1950s. They picked up speed with the 1954 Supreme Court decision desegregating the schools, and then galloped ahead with the freedom marches in the South and the rebellions that broke out in Watts, Detroit, Harlem, Newark and dozens of other cities when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated.

Wallace attempted to make his campaign a national one. But it faltered. Some thought that the assassination attempt which left him partially paralyzed was his undoing, but that wasn't it. The real reason was that the Black liberation movement was on the rise and neither Maddox nor Wallace could overcome it. Eventually, Wallace did get back in the Alabama state house, but only because he moderated his program.

The all-out racism of the Maddox-Wallace type proved altogether inadequate to stop the inevitable development and considerable victories of the Black and Latino movements. Segregation eventually had to be abandoned.

Tried to hold back a progressive tide

The 1960s and '70s were years of upsurge not only of the oppressed nationalities but also of other progressive movements. The anti-war movement was particularly youthful and dynamic. The women's movement was beginning to broaden into a mass awakening. Lesbians and gays were asserting their rights and adopting militant tactics.

Charleston, S.C. hospital workers won an 1199 union contract in a 1969 strike. Strikers said racist attitudes were putting patient safety at risk.

The anti-imperialist movement was making gains everywhere. The very existence of China and the Soviet Union provided support to the national liberation struggles and the progressive and anti-imperialist forces.

In contrast to the present, it was a progressive era. Even someone like George Shultz, best known as Reagan's Secretary of State, mediated on behalf of hospital union Local 1199 in the South when he was Nixon's Secretary of Labor. And the union won a victory.

Up until the recession of 1974-76, the labor movement was on the rise. Black and white workers were making gains in the South. Rank-and-file workers often rebelled against union leaders who were too moderate.

Fascists on the offensive

The present racism of David Duke differs in style and tone from that of Maddox and Wallace, even if in essence it's the same old stuff. However, he is much more dangerous because this is a very different epoch.

The Duke movement is not just a defensive attempt to halt the progress of civil rights. It is a wholesale offensive to undo and reverse the historic gains made by the Black and other progressive forces.

The Duke campaign comes in the midst of an anti-labor offensive. Gains made by the workers have been crumbling; the capitalist recession and the

attacks on the living standards of the workers have brought frustration and anger. The labor movement has been forced into concession after concession. Strike breaking and scab herding are on the order of the day.

The situation is ripe for a fascist demagogue to prey upon these frustrations, especially among the middle class who are losing their moorings to the bourgeoisie.

Duke is utilizing the economic situation in Louisiana, where the bust began some years ago with the collapse of the oil industry, to foment racism. But what is happening there is part and parcel of a national phenomenon – serious unemployment, wage cuts, and budget cuts which lead to more layoffs of state and municipal workers.

His two rivals in the gubernatorial race, Edwin Edwards and, in the primary, Buddy Roemer, have not addressed these questions at all. They've exacerbated the situation with their policies. They have no more answers than James Florio, the governor of New Jersey, who carries out the same policies but without the racist demagogy.

Racism alone could not win in the Louisiana of today, were it not for the economic disaster produced by capitalist decline. Of course, those really responsible for this crisis are not the Black people or the poor, but the bankers and businessmen, especially the oil companies.

Depression spawned Hitler

They are the ones supporting Duke behind the scenes, in the same way the bankers and industrialists supported Hitler – one of Duke's idols. Hitler started off as a local phenomenon in Munich who would never have attained national stature had it not been for the severe and unprecedented capitalist breakdown that began with the stock market crash of 1929 and lasted through the 1930s.

Hitler served the German capitalists by breaking the back of the strong workers' movement there. He used both violence and demagogy to divert popular anger over the economic crisis into anti-Semitism, making Jews the scapegoats for everything that had gone wrong while diverting attention away from the real capitalist rulers of Germany.

While he did the dirty work of the capitalists by breaking up the workers' organizations and decimating their socialist and communist leaders, he demagogically called his party the National Socialist Workers Party.

Racist scapegoating

The Duke campaign is still in its embryonic stage. Nevertheless, it is clearly a fascist movement that is attempting to utilize the disastrous economic situation in Louisiana, made particularly severe by the slump in oil and gas there, to break into national politics.

The ruling class in Louisiana doesn't want another populist of the Huey Long type, who actually did carry out economic reforms that aided the working class. They want an out-and-out demagogue who can utilize racism and make promises and yet be totally controlled by big business.

The danger of the Duke campaign goes beyond being an attack against Black people. It's an attack against the whole working class. It's an attempt to reverse historical gains made by Black, white and Latin people, women and gays and others. It's a real fascist threat and has profound national and international significance.

It is already public knowledge that Duke's financial contributions come not only from sources in Louisiana but from New York, Los Angeles, and elsewhere. The Maddox-Wallace segregationists had no international connections. Maddox was regarded as an oddity, a curiosity, who represented the past. Wallace had a broader movement, but it too foundered on the basis that it really had no national base, let alone international support. It was strictly a Southern racist movement.

The Duke candidacy, however, represents an international phenomenon. Duke finds kinship not only in New York City's racist elements but as far away as Switzerland, France, Germany and England. Many eyes on the global front are carefully watching what happens in Louisiana.

Even A.M. Rosenthal, a conservative columnist for the New York Times, is greatly alarmed at the prospect of "a Nazi governor" being elected for the first time in the U.S. However, he leaves out the fundamental causes for the rise of the Duke movement – the capitalist economic crisis – just as bourgeois historians leave out what was the basis for the rise of Nazism in Germany.

All the more is it necessary to tender the greatest support to the anti-Duke, anti-racist, pro-labor, progressive movement that is arising in response to this very significant threat. As has been seen so many times before, it is the whip of political reaction that stimulates and brings to the fore the vital forces and inexhaustible energy of a working class resurgence.

Remarks by Comrade Sam Marcy

Nov. 11, 1991

Once again, we have taken the initiative at a time when the rest of the movement seemed to be asleep. It was so in Panama, it was so in the Congo many years ago, and it has been so on many other issues. We are often the first to recognize and begin taking advantage of a significant national or international development. This is a very important and significant initiative, far ahead of the rest of the movement, and it should redound to the benefit of the party and the movement.

This struggle over David Duke is part of a global development. This seems incontrovertible. It has a lot to do with reactionary developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the lackadaisical character of the labor union bureaucracy here, the anti-labor offensive, and the nature of the capitalist recession, which, as admitted in several capitalist dispatches from Louisiana, has lasted as long as 10 years.

Duke's phenomenal rise as a national figure must be understood in terms of the class struggle and the capitalist recession, which much of the bourgeoisie acknowledges but is unable to address. Duke is undeniably leading a fascist-type movement.

The bourgeoisie, especially the conservative bourgeoisie represented by George Bush, has been slow to react. They are late in opposing it, even more so than the local ruling class, which has begun denouncing Duke only in the last ten days. The progressive movement is lagging even further behind.

One indication of this is our recent hurried demonstration when Duke came to town. We had little time to prepare, but we got the word out. The turnout was mostly party members and some friends, which was exceptionally disappointing. This is no fault of the party – the information spread – but there should have been hundreds, if not more. The message did not spread like wildfire, as it should have.

If another country had been invaded – if Iraq had been attacked, for instance – there would have been at least a couple of hundred people protesting. But we couldn't get even that on this issue.

Fighting racism abroad is easier for white progressives to rally behind, but not here at home. This is a serious problem. The greatest problem in the United States is the racism of the ruling class and how it affects the majority of the masses. It is deep and profound, and our fundamental job is to combat it.

The arrival of a fascist figure like Duke should have been a call to arms for all progressives. Yet, many did not see it as important enough to show up. But this issue is central to our program.

We must reorient the party on this matter. In the past, we understood this well, but we assumed the class struggle would naturally erode chauvinism and raise class solidarity. That has not happened.

Years ago, in Queens, New York, a White Castle refused to hire or serve Black people. We distributed a leaflet directed at white workers, agitating and propagandizing them to change their views. Regardless of how it was received, the action acknowledged that their lives were a struggle and should not be ignored. We have done this before, and we assumed this issue would resolve itself through the general class struggle of workers, with our participation.

But it requires more than that. It requires specific action with a clear understanding of the problem. The Duke phenomenon has forced the nation's and the world's attention on this issue.

The gains made by the Black, Latino, women's, and LGBTQ+ movements are now in jeopardy. A significant section of the ruling class wants to reverse them. They say, "We are the majority, and we can stop this." They see annual civil rights legislation as constant concessions and want to put an end to it. That is what fascism is about – the historical movement to reverse gains made by the working class and oppressed people over centuries.

Duke frames it as an issue of affirmative action and welfare, but beneath it all is a broader ruling class effort to halt social progress. Some in the ruling class are frightened by Duke because he threatens the established political order. The "old boys' network" would be replaced by a new leadership, which they fear.

Though now publicly opposing Duke, the ruling class was slow to react. The New York Times has only recently begun running major stories about him. The bourgeoisie is now pouring money into the Edwards campaign.

Edwards' campaign even offered to fund our demonstration. We should have taken advantage of that and requested substantial financial support. We should have mobilized unions for funding, as more than just one or two would have contributed if approached correctly.

But money alone will not change the situation. The ruling class can fund Edwards, but they cannot suddenly create 10,000 jobs to shift public sentiment. People's minds are already made up. Shifting money late in the game will not change that. Duke might win, though probably not. The ruling class, the press, and TV networks are aligned against him. Even Bush made a strong statement denouncing him – though it failed to eliminate his appeal.

If Duke loses, many will assume the struggle is over. That should not be the case. We must stay engaged and establish a presence in Louisiana. More importantly, we need a thorough political and theoretical grounding on the nature of fascism and its relationship to the class struggle. Many in the movement will call Duke a Nazi, but our understanding of fascism differs fundamentally from that of the bourgeoisie.

On March 3, 1993, police attacked a protest against a Confederate statue, a site used by the Ku Klux Klan in New Orleans. The symbol of white supremacy had previously been removed after years of protest. It remained in storage until February 1993, when David Duke sued for its return. Protests led to several arrests at the monument's rededication, including state Rep. Avery Alexander, seen here, who was 82 years old at the time. In 2015, this statue was one of four Confederate monuments scheduled for removal. The monument was taken down on April 24, 2017, in the middle of the day.

We must differentiate modern fascism from the fascism of the 1920s and 1930s. Then, fascism was a reaction to proletarian revolution. Today, it is a movement to change the capitalist state while retaining capitalism in a racist and privileged form. The workers are not currently seeking to overthrow capitalism, so modern fascism attempts to win them over on a racist basis rather than destroying them outright.

Capitalism is decaying. The ruling class can donate to Edwards, but they cannot create jobs or reverse the economic crisis. Military spending, once a stimulus, has become a depressant. The Gulf War demonstrated its limits. The capitalist recession is structural, and no short-term measures will fix it.

Our challenge is how to intervene effectively. We need to speak not only to progressives but also to white workers, who are being courted by racist appeals. Edwards' campaign is weak in this regard, relying on defeatist arguments about economic decline rather than challenging racism directly.

Our initiative is commendable, but we must be strategic and revise our priorities if necessary. Political clarity is essential – connecting capitalism with the fascist threat requires skill. The ruling class now denounces Duke, but only as a tactic. We must expose this contradiction.

Our first task is to align the party behind our political conception of fascism and class struggle. We have taken the initiative – just as we did with Panama and other struggles. That is a success in itself.

It may not yield immediate results. It may not. It's a hard nut to crack in Louisiana, and that's why the CP and others are not there. They are absent not only because they overlooked it, but because it's difficult – especially for white and progressive elements to establish a presence.

This presents a great opportunity. Will it fizzle? I don't know any more than you do. But we took the initiative. We took the initiative on Panama and on other matters. There was discussion about whether an editorial comrade could dedicate two weeks to finishing a book on Panama. I immediately said no. The editorial staff comes first, and the book comes second.

We must revise our priorities. If we are going to write about fascism, imperialism, and capitalism, we need our best comrades on the task. Through our press, we must enhance the rank and file's understanding and reassess our cadre in a more revolutionary direction.

It remains valid that when the labor union caucus realized what was happening, they knew we had established our presence there and faced no opposition in contacting unions. Not just one comrade from a single union, but a concerted effort.

Many union leaders are Black now, but even white leaders would have supported us. Hundreds of local unions would have contributed. But it may not be us anymore.

That said, I believe we have done a commendable job. Very much so. What I want to stress is that we should not abandon everything and rush to Louisiana, but approach it strategically. We are shifting our focus. If we need to deprioritize other matters, we will do so without hesitation. If an objective priority emerges, we will act accordingly. First, however, we need political clarity on our stance. It is not easy to connect capitalism with the fascist threat – it requires the skill of our comrades. As seen in today's Times, someone remarked, "The economic situation caused it. Without the economic situation, Duke wouldn't be where he is." We acknowledge the same factor.

Once they say that, we must clarify that it is not just the economic situation – it is the ruling class that bears responsibility. If they argue that the ruling class opposes Duke, how do we respond? Well, they support Edwards, who shares the same economic class policies. Their opposition to Duke is not wholehearted – it is tactical. We must explain that.

When Bush denounced Duke, we should not have been caught off guard. We had emphasized Bush's inaction, and now he has spoken out. We must point out that his statement was mere lip service to protect the Republican Party, not a genuine defense of workers or the masses. He seeks to ensure a Republican ally rather than contend with a political outsider.

Once more, to review – the ruling class, in general, was frightened by Hitler. However, the most aggressive and powerful monopolies supported him, knowing that smaller bankers and industrialists feared him. The same dynamic exists today. The Times published a vehement attack on Duke, yet still defends capitalism. It will endorse Edwards, and our challenge will be how to respond.

Our first task is to unify the party behind our political understanding of fascism and its relationship to the class struggle. We must politically arm our comrades heading to Louisiana.

About Sam Marcy
1911 - 1998

Sam Marcy came to the United States as a young child from a small village in Russia. He remembered wearing a rough potato sack for clothing. He remembered being dragged to a neighbor's one snowy night to escape the "Whites" – bands of counterrevolutionaries who terrorized Jewish villages. He remembered the Red Army coming later – "our army."

Marcy wrote and spoke about capitalist exploitation of the working class. He analyzed developments in the U.S. and many countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Marcy stressed the need for complete international solidarity with other socialist countries under military and economic attacks from the imperialist apparatus. He strongly supported revolutionary liberation struggles and a prominent supporter of the Palestinian movement

In his book "High Tech, Low Pay, A Marxist Analysis of the Changing Character of the Working Class" Marcy showed how the scientific-technological changes in the structure of capitalist industry brought with it a change in the social character of the working class, introducing a growing proportion of Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, women, and undocumented workers.

Marcy saw the fight against racism and oppression as pivotal to the struggle for socialism. His book, "The Klan and The Government - Foe or Allies?" urgently calls for building a mass movement to wipe out the Klan. In the early 1970s, he boldly broke tradition by supporting the early Gay Liberation movement in the U.S.

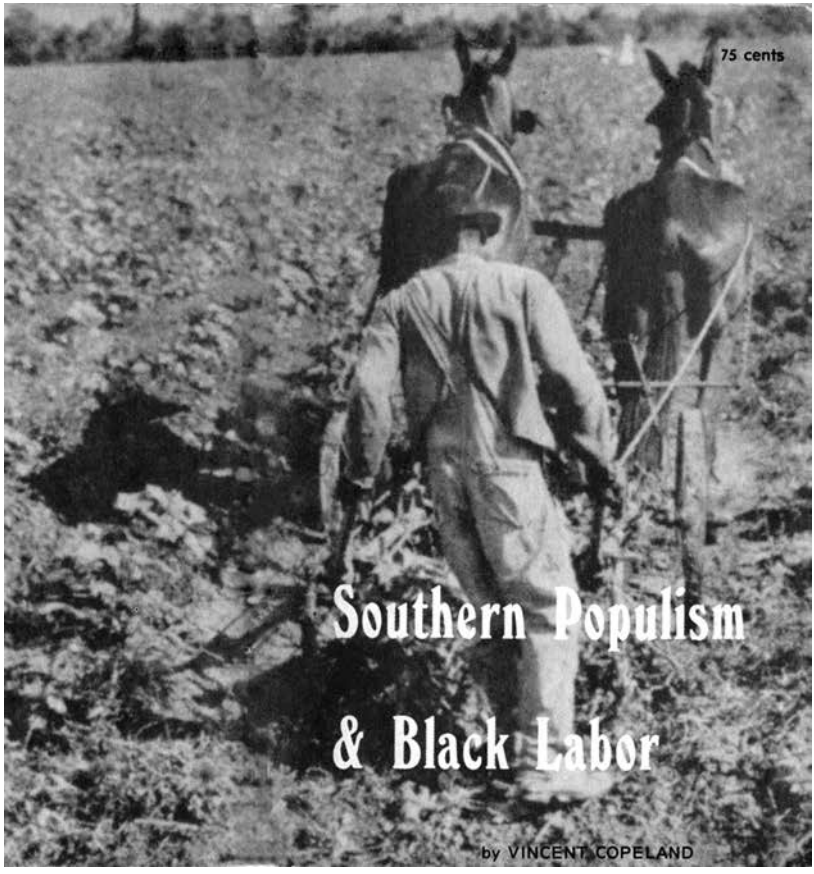
One of his last major works was the book "Perestroika: a Marxist Critique," in which he foresaw the impending disaster of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's policies: a complete capitulation to capitalism and imperialism that would lead to the dismantling of the Soviet Union.

Marcy was a fearless fighter for the working class against capitalism. He firmly believed in the working class's ability to act in unity to overcome oppression and abolish the capitalist class, which would lead to building worldwide socialism.

SOUTHERN POPULISM & BLACK LABOR

VINCENT COPELAND

1973



SOUTHERN POPULISM & BLACK LABOR

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Introduction

This pamphlet was written during the 1972 Presidential election campaign and serialized in *Workers World*. As a result it refers repeatedly to individuals who may be completely forgotten (and that would not be a bad thing at all) before the booklet comes off the printing press.

Two of the individuals already in partial or permanent eclipse are George McGovern and George Wallace. McGovern, the "extreme" liberal, and Wallace, the really extreme racist, occupied a special position in the middle of 1972, particularly before the latter got shot and cleared the way for an overwhelming Nixon victory.

Whereas Richard Nixon, powerful and dangerous though he is, is a common or garden variety of opportunist right-wing racist scoundrel, the other two candidates represented, or at least seemed to represent certain *principles* – one of principles being the liberal one and the other being a reactionary fascist one.

This general proposition was more or less cIear to all people. But the super-racist Wallace moderated the extreme language of his 1968 Presidential campaign in 1972 and covered it with a fig-leaf; Establishment reporters called it "Populism." In addition to clothing his extreme racism and segregationism in the double-talk of a straight-faced opposition to "busing innocent little children," he appealed to the poor (whites) to vote against the *rich* liberals, against high taxes, etc.

Since the frightened liberals and sleazy editorial writers had to cover up Wallace's racism partly in order to cover up their own cowardice in not attacking him, they concentrated on the fig-leaf and poured out some tons of ink in speculation about Wallace's "Populism."

McGovern, who won the Democratic nomination from Wallace and other less forthright racists, also appealed to the disenchanted, the poor, etc. And there were many columnists who, out of a brainless consistency as well as a typical ruling-class desire to confuse the voters, called *both* McGovern and Wallace Populists. In reality, the two men were as opposite as you could get within the Democratic Party, that is, within capitalist-imperialist politics in general.

Some commentators insisted that many voters for Wallace would actually go for McGovern after the Alabama demagogue was shot. Now, only a few months later, this speculation has been completely forgotten.

But even if it had not been forgotten, it would have been convincingly disproved by the 1972 Nixon vote, which clearly combined the Wallace and Nixon votes of 1968. The right-wing Republicans and ultra-right Democrats and Republicans joined forces under the leadership of the almost unanimous Wall Street community to elect the racist, anti-labor Nixon.

The purpose of this pamphlet, however, is not to rehash the 1972 election, but to throw some light on why "Populism" today contains a sneer – an altogether different intonation than it had in the 1890's. It contains the sneer of the cultured middle-class intellectual and writer of books or newspaper columns who has no confidence in the "people" – particularly the oppressed and working people. It is a word now loaded with the condescension of comfortable white liberals who imagine they are superior to the poor and ignorant white racists because they, the cultural elite, have read the right books and utter the right words about Black Freedom.

Having seen many white workers aroused in opposition to the Black workers, but without having the slightest comprehension of who arouses them, the liberal intellectuals wring their hands at the backwardness of the white workers and the reactionary character of "Populism," which in their minds is a *white* phenomenon, since they take it for granted that the "people" are white.

They will soon be pointing to the tremendous vote for Nixon as proof in itself that the white masses are racist, reactionary, backward – and stupid – by nature, when it is really just a matter of the masses being brainwashed by the *New York Daily News* or the *Chicago Tribune*, rather than by the *New York Times* (which last-named paper does its own brainwashing and takes care of making the liberals support the racist system in their own peculiar

way). And while such people will not lift one little finger to actually struggle or sacrifice in the cause of Black Freedom, they will console themselves with the thought that the masses are reactionary and that they, the liberals, would save humanity, if only humanity would allow itself to be educated by them, the liberals.

I hope that the following lines will not only set the record straight about the real Populism, but will also help to puncture the pretensions of these anti-Populist, anti-working-class elements. I hope that in providing a little ammunition against the reactionary imperialist system, it will also help white workers to learn to support their Black sisters and brothers in the real rather than the shadow struggles of our time. I hope it will encourage Black workers with the perspective of fighting for the unity of all the workers, even though Black caucuses may be absolutely necessary in the light of the persistence of white racism. And I hope that through the mistakes and failures of the white Populists (particularly in respect to the Black Populists), certain clues to class victory will emerge and this work may show a glimpse of the coming new and really revolutionary Populism of the working class, one in which the Black worker will play an outstanding role and the white worker will accept and reinforce that role.

November 10, 1972

CHAPTER 1

Populism and anti-Populism

A new word cropped up in the 1972 political campaign – or a new old word. And that word is "Populism." Partly in order to cover up George Wallace's appeal to white racism, and partly to try to explain a vote-getting strength that seems to go beyond this appeal, the newspaper columnists have begun to talk about Wallace's "Populism." At the same time, George McGovern is also being labeled as something of a Populist because he, too, speaks of reducing taxes and he occasionally criticizes the big corporations.

Since Populism literally means "people-ism " it is hard to see how Wallace, who is so viciously opposed to all Black people, can be a Populist in any way whatsoever. McGovern, it is be true, claims to speak in the name of all people just as Johnson claimed to do. And McGovern was once a supporter of Henry Wallace, who dared to oppose the Cold War at its very height and to take on both the Republicans and Democrats in the Presidential election of 1948. But McGovern, although he may be personally more committed to "people-ism" than the present Wallace, and not a racist as far as anyone knows, is even closer to the big corporations, and as President he could be depended upon to be their faithful servant. Even if McGovern does not intend to be the war-making dictator that Wallace does, he could find a way, like those of other liberals – Wilson, F.D. Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson – to lead the people to war, if his faction of big business were to require it.

McGovern, representing the particular faction of the ruling monopolists he does – a faction which at present is opposed to the Vietnam war mainly because it cannot win – fights Nixon, the chief war-maker, with the weapons of liberalism and "reform" politics, counting on the war-weariness of the people to get himself elected.

George Wallace, however, represents – up to now – only local corporate interests, i.e., the Alabama branch offices of U.S. big business. He only aspires to represent the front offices and the executive suites of Wall Street, and to represent them in his own twisted, racist way.

But Wallace does have something McGovern does not have. Or at least, he seems to be more serious about establishing it – and that is an active mass base, looking for mass action. Some of this base may be just ordinary, dissatisfied people. But the dynamic and activist part of it is undoubtedly the most prejudiced and anti-Black whites. Regardless of misunderstandings and confusion of large numbers of whites who support him, Wallace's own ambition is to lead a white racist mob on a national scale. And this is not the same as leading the *people*.

Some of the liberals who call Wallace a "Populist" seem to think so, however. And many of them profess to see Wallace's appeal as basically similar to McGovern's. Big-city editorialists have insisted that in spite of his demagogy, Wallace somehow does represent "the people" – it being understood that "the people" are an ignorant mass not to be trusted, and that the real choice in U.S. society is between fascist dictators and liberal saviors.

Last year in Pontiac, Michigan, a number of pro-Wallace whites organized a bus boycott, and with the help of admitted members of the Ku Klux Klan, dynamited 10 school buses. Then on Sept. 14, they picketed the Fisher Body plant of General Motors on the south side of town and stopped most of the day and afternoon shifts from working on that day, as part of the "protest" against school busing.

In the subsequent white boycott of the Pontiac schools, only one-quarter of the white children stayed home. But the reactionary movement was formidable, especially in the light of the KKK violence.

Some of the columnists attach the name "Populist" even to racist acts like this, because, they say, the whites involved have other grievances besides their objections to busing for the desegregation of schools. One reporter of a Detroit "underground" paper even did an "in-depth" study of this racist movement and called its chief organizer, Charles Yockey, a *Populist*. This was after describing Yockey as a vulgar, sleazy character who lived by "renting 16 mm movies of naked bodies to Pontiac's civic leaders."

Underneath this characterization of Wallace and his supporters as "Populist" there lurks a contempt for the people and particularly the working people. Underneath it is also the belief that white workers are the "people" and a non-belief that white workers would ever support the struggle of Black workers. There is also the conviction that only the middle-class intellectual-liberal,

rather than the vulgar "Populists" could understand the real problem and could be trusted to carry on the fight for the desegregation of schools, possibly along with an honorable and uncorrupted police force cooperating with such dedicated liberals in forcing the backward poor whites to do the right thing.

The liberal underground writer who practically lived with Yockey for days, dogging his footsteps with great diligence to get his story, further confused himself by saying that the Pontiac movement had a "schizophrenic combination of left-wing and right-wing slogans" – implying thereby that the people concerned were more to be pitied than blamed, and never suggesting once in several large pages of small print that the anti-bus demonstrators or the Ku Klux Klan ought to be punished for what they did – either by the Black people or by the Black and white workers together.

It is true that there have been occasions in history in which people have used right-wing words along with left-wing actions. Such occasions are often known as revolutions. People have sometimes said, "God Save the King," for instance, just at the time when they were in the process of removing the King's head from his body and doing away with kings altogether.

Or take the case of the up-to-now rare white shop steward who battles for the upgrading of a Black worker, advancing the latter over other whites with less seniority in the plant.

Due to lack of education and the generally racist atmosphere, the white steward might use a derogatory word in referring to the Black worker's race, while the foreman who resists the steward's progressive action might use the correct word (having been taught to do so by a shrewd labor-relations department). In such a case any Black worker would know exactly which of the white persons was the enemy and which the ally. He would have no trouble in diagnosing the schizophrenia of either party.

But there have also been occasions in which the opposite contradiction has prevailed, when people performed right-wing acts and covered them up with faintly left-wing slogans culled from the genuine progressives and revolutionaries of their time.

These have been *fascist or counterrevolutionary actions*, such as anti-Jewish pogroms and anti-Black lynchings and terror campaigns, in which the persecutors often talk against the oppressors, even while they are murdering the oppressed.

Thus the racist acts in Pontiac, Michigan, are best described as acts of a fascist character and not remotely as manifestations of "Populism" or peopleism. And *this* schizophrenia is a social sickness, not a psychological problem. It requires not a doctor but a powerful political cleanser, a political education of the more innocent dupes along with a more forceful, sudden, and salutary education for the most recalcitrant racists and the Ku Klux Klan.

The people, it is true, are constantly brain-washed by their rulers and often act against their own real interests. But there really was a Populism once in this country – and especially in the South.

The mass of whites in the South have been manipulated by the rulers more successfully than anywhere else in the United States. But the only large and consistent *mass* movement of Southern whites that surged up from the masses themselves was an *anti*-racist one and it called itself "Populist."

CHAPTER 2

They tried to overcome

It is true that, honest and rebellious as the old Populists were, right down to the last country editor and last member of the humblest white farmer's family, they were basically white-oriented – but with one tremendous difference from the Wallaceites and the Klan today. The tremendous difference was that the whites tried very hard to overcome their anti-Black prejudice, defended the right of Black people to vote, fought – sometimes physically – against lynching, and agitated for political equality.

The Southern Populists were much more concerned about this than the Northern or Western groups and much more pro-Black in their writings and speeches. Their Black membership was many, many times that of the Black membership of the North and West, with well over a million Blacks in the Southern Alliance (the predecessor of the People's Party). Before this there was an all-Black "Colored Alliance" formed on the initiative of the Blacks themselves in the most basic sense. But the white leaders did the first organizing of Blacks and the latter were warmly welcomed into the movement and played a highly important role during the real heyday of Populism.

The top leaders of the movement were all white – which automatically proves that the period was not as revolutionary as that of Reconstruction had been. But the *attitude* of these white leaders, and particularly in the South, was not like that of the so-called Populists of the Wallace variety today.

Even the more "moderate" white leaders were considerably more militant in their support for Black equality than the liberals of today. James Baird Weaver, for instance, was the People's Party candidate for president in 1892, having replaced a more radical one who had just died. Weaver, who had been a Green-back candidate in 1880, said in his principal 1892 campaign speech entitled, *A Call to Action* :

> ''Our own war of independence was a war against taxes. Our late internal struggle [a very euphemistic reference to the Civil War – euphemistic because so many of the white participants on the Southern side were now in the

People's Party – V.C.] was for the freedom of labor and the right of the laborer to possess and enjoy his own. That struggle is still on and it is now thundering at our gates with renewed energy. … The people will rise and overturn the despoilers although they shake the earth by the displacement."

Freedom for Black labor

Weaver, although somewhat less militant than some of the other leaders, did not hesitate to speak of "freedom of labor," which in connection with the Civil War meant freedom of Black labor. He himself had been a brigadier general on the Union side. Southern Populists gave him great support, however (he got 36.5% of the vote in Alabama), and not one of them would have dreamt of counterposing Jeb Stuart to Weaver or waving the Confederate flag at his meetings – all of which Wallace and his Southern supporters do on every possible occasion.

Milford W. Howard was a Populist Congressman from *Alabama*, elected on the People's Party ticket in the early 1890s. Showing how the two big parties worked and referring to the manipulation of the race issue (to the detriment of the *whites*!) he wrote the following words in his book, "The American Plutocracy":

"In the North the shibboleth has been, 'vote as you shoot.' In the South it has been, 'down with the carpet-bagger and the Yankee. …'

"Every four years there is a great commotion throughout the country, and the Democrats nominate a candidate for President and the Republicans nominate a candidate, and then both parties go to the plutocracy and say, 'We must have campaign funds with which to make this fight.' They get the money, and then the loudmouthed campaign orators go out to harangue the people and each abuses the other's party, and says the leaders are the meanest men on earth, and that the members of the party are all too corrupt to occupy even a humble place in one corner of His Satanic Majesty's Kingdom, and they proceed to wave the bloody shirt on the one side in the wildest alarm, while the followers on the other side shout at the top of their voices, 'Ni- -er, ni- -er!' and when the people are all worked up, almost to a frenzy, the wily old plutocrats get together and determine which candidate must be elected and at once go to manipulating and wire-pulling so that they can accomplish their purpose. …" – *Quoted by Norman Pollack in "The Populist Mind".*

Howard's idea of opposing the shout of "N- -er, n- -er!" and eliminating the cry of "Black supremacy" did not flow from conscious solidarity with Black

Freedom but from an analysis of the big business rule over the white masses and a keen understanding of how racial conflict perpetuated that rule. And his idea was not at all unusual in those times. He was a very "practical" radical and was writing a book that he fully expected his constituents to read. Congressmen, like governors, are usually quite interested in getting re-elected. And he had good cause to believe the voters would listen to what he said. These voters, it should be emphasized, came from the very same social strata in Alabama that the voters for George Wallace now come from. But instead of telling the (white) "workingman" to be a segregationist, as Wallace does, Howard *attacked* that approach as a device of the big business "plutocracy."

"No more color line"

Ignatius Donnelly, a People's Party man and an extremely popular author of the day, said of the movement's program:

> "We propose to wipe the Mason and Dixon line out of our geography; to wipe the color line out of politics; to give Americans prosperity [so that] the man who creates shall own what he creates; to take the robber class from the throat of industry; to take possession of the government of the United States and put our nominee in the White House."

The Wallaceites want to put the "color line" into politics – with a vengeance. It is true, they do hope to "wipe the Mason and Dixon line out of our geography" – but with a slight difference. They would move it steadily North until it becomes the border of the United States, with the whole country openly racist and white supremacist. But the real Populists, whatever their deficiencies and in spite of their generally white orientation, wanted to move the line steadily *South* and make the then generally fairer political and social system of the North the rule in the South, too.

Lorenzo Dow Lewelling was People's Party governor of Kansas from 1893 to 1895. Unlike the present governor of Alabama he was opposed to segregation and in favor of Black liberation. In a speech at Kansas City, Kansas, on July 26, 1894, he made the following observations:

> "I have been asked why I was a Populist. I want to say to you, friends, that the same principles that made me a Republican in the early days [*i.e., during abolition and Civil War – V.C.*] have today made me a Populist, and I'll tell you what they are. I remember when I was a little boy, my parents were the old line abolition kind of people that believed in equal rights to all and

> special privileges to none. God bless them for that sentiment, and don't you say so? Well, I remember in those days of the abolition question that we took a little paper called Uncle Lucas' Child's Paper, and one side of the paper bore a motto about the size of a coin in the center of a picture – a picture of an African slave with his hands uplifted and in chains, and around the rim of the coin a motto 'Am I not a man and a Brother?' That made a wonderful impression on my mind ... I say these are the reasons that made me a Populist, and today my heart goes out to the working men and women of this nation as it went out to the Black slave. I believe and I say it freely, that the working men and women of this country, many of them, are simply today in the shackles of industrial slavery."

Perhaps Governor Lewelling (who was expressing the feelings of millions of white Populists) did not really *identify* with the Black laborer. But he made a conscious effort to connect the slavery of the Black to the slavery of the white, while Governor Wallace, 78 years later, says he espouses the "workingman's" cause, and works day and night to turn white *against* Black in a calculated effort to wreck that cause.

CHAPTER 3

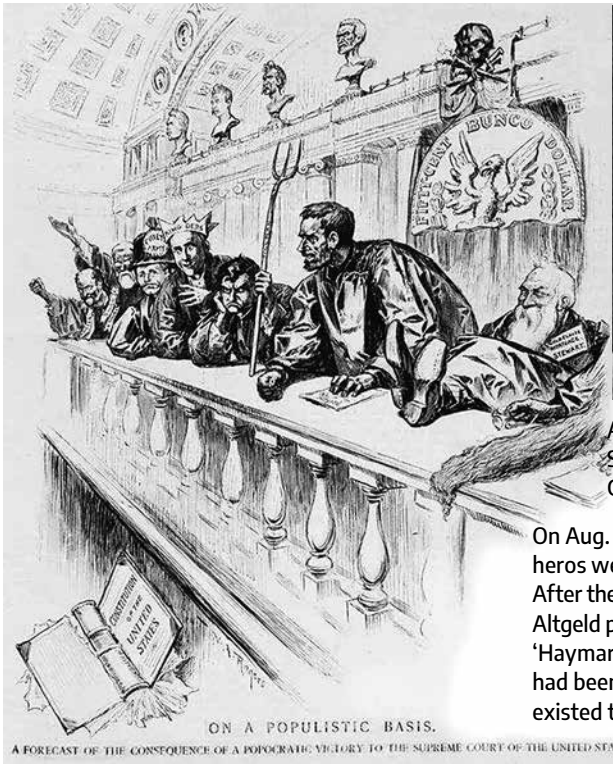
They defied the trusts, fought the government

The followers of George Wallace may have some Populist delusions about their leader in addition to their racist prejudices to which he appeals. They may hope for lower taxes and better breaks against the monopolies as a result of their supporting Wallace. But if they do, they are doomed to cruel disappointment.

The reason they are doomed is not merely that Wallace is a liar and a demagogue. (McGovern is not likely to reduce taxes very much or for very long, either.) The reason is that Wallace, like McGovern, represents the same corporate interests he claims to be fighting – as do all major politicians of the Democratic Party, as well as the Republican. The "Populism" of Wallace, like that of McGovern, consists of making certain *promises* to the people, which will inevitably be broken.

The *old* Populism – the Populism that was so popular in Wallace's home state of Alabama, as well as throughout the South – was a *big social movement* of the masses themselves against the corporate monopolies. It was led by hundreds or even thousands of small business and farm people who had a vital stake in getting the monopolies off their neck, a stake that had nothing to do with white people opposing the rights of Black people, but on the contrary, compelled both white and Black to seek each other's aid in the giant struggle. The movement educated and mobilized larger and larger sections of the broad masses.

The old Populism was infinitely more serious in its opposition to the big monopolies than Wallace. And yet it failed. A revival of it today in its 19th Century form would be a great advance over any large movement on the political arena of 1972, at least from the point of view of honesty, struggle and racial equality. But it, too, would fail. It would not deceive its followers in the demagogic way that George Wallace does. But it would collapse – and much more quickly than did the People's Party of 1892.


BUNCO
DOLLAR
CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES
ON A POPULISTIC BASIS.
A FORECAST OF THE CONSEQUENCE OF A POPOCRATIC VICTORY TO THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES.

A pro-'Bulwark of Privilege' Supreme Court cartoon vilifies Governor Altgeld and populists.

On Aug. 20, 1886, seven Haymarket heros were sentenced to be hanged. After the voters of Illinois elected him, Altgeld pardoned three of remaining 'Haymarket Eight,' finding that the jury had been 'packed.' No evidence existed to show they were bombers.

The reason is that the *social basis* for Populism – that is, for an anti-monopoly political fight led by small owners through the ballot box – has gone with the wind. In fact, it went with the winds of the elections of 1896 and the Spanish-American War of 1898. And it was the economic victory of the billion-dollar monopoly businessmen over the small-business, small-farmer Populists that blew up that wind over 80 years ago.

But in their time, the Populists elected state legislators, governors, and in one Congressional session during the eighties, with a total of about 350 members in the House, there were over 50 Representatives with generally Populist leanings. In the election of 1892, they elected some state governors, five U.S. Senators and 10 Representatives directly, and frightened the Wall Street rulers considerably thereby.

Some of the office-holders of Populism showed an ability to carry out the people's wishes and a loyalty to the people's interests that is absolutely non-existent among the politicians of big business today.

The legendary Governor John P. Altgeld of Illinois, although not in the People's Party, was deeply committed to Populist principles. He refused to call Federal troops during the Pullman strike in Chicago (1894) and openly condemned President Grover Cleveland for doing so. It was he who defied every corporation in the country and sacrificed his political career by pardoning the survivors of the original May Day (1886) frameups – the so-called anarchists, who fought so magnificently for the eight-hour day.

Governor Davis H. Waite of Colorado, who *was* a representative of the People's Party, sent that state's militia to *protect* striking miners at Cripple Creek in 1894 on perhaps the only such occasion in the history of the United States.

The mining companies had hired hundreds of thugs and had a sheriff deputize them and use them to terrorize the strikers. Waite eliminated the "deputies" and then acted as arbitrator of the strike, but an arbitrator of an entirely different kind than the Park Avenue variety who now impose sweetheart agreements on labor.

He also used the militia against the police when the police commissioners proved corrupt and used the armed power of the police ranks to keep themselves in office. The U.S. Army was called in at that time to prevent him from disciplining the police, thus showing that the monopolists (who included the owners of Cripple Creek) in Washington were more interested in keeping their own hold on the police, even if the latter were corrupt enough to take bribes from all the brothels and gambling houses in Colorado.

"Law and order" was not invented by George Wallace; it has nearly always meant the law and order of the ruling class. The Populists, however, in spite of other deficiencies, saw through this fakery and exposed it for what it was.

The leaders of the original Populists were not only serious about reducing *taxes*, they also wanted to reduce the power of the big corporations themselves, and the ones they did not want nationalized, they wanted pared down to ordinary size so that ordinary small businesses could compete with them.

Even in those early days there were several companies with hundreds of millions in capital, and more than a dozen with 25 million or so. (Today there are no less than 127 companies *each with assets over one billion dollars.*) (Imagine Wallace calling upon the Morgan-dominated U.S. Steel Company to disgorge its Alabama plant and give it back to the "small" corporate millionaires who used to have it!)

The Populists wanted the end of corporation domination of the state and national governments and they exposed how that domination worked in every way they could. They exposed racism and white supremacy as part of the mechanism of this corporation rule and correctly saw this white supremacy as an obstacle in their getting rid of their oppressors. Wallace and his kind, on the other hand, attack the corporations mostly for their alleged help to the Black people in getting jobs and for trying to soften the racism by school desegregation, etc.

The Black-and-white People's Party of Alabama rolled up 47.64% of the state's votes in 1894. But it did not do so by bribing state construction contractors and buying votes. It did not do so by appealing to racism and segregation. It fought the racist plantation owners tooth and nail, just as it fought the Yankee businessmen who were in cahoots with these ex-slave-masters.

Neither George Wallace nor George McGovern would come out and say that the corporations run every state legislature as well as Congress and the President. But the Populists did.

The previously quoted Congressman Milford Howard of Fort Payne, Alabama wrote, after a passionate condemnation of Standard Oil, John D. Rockefeller and the railroads for their oppression of farmers and workers:

> "These trusts have been guilty of bribery, lying, perjury, high-handed robbery, midnight assassinations and cold-blooded murders. They have crushed competition, bankrupted thousands of honest men, oppressed the poor, robbed and plundered the helpless, until today they are absolute and supreme masters of the situation, able to regulate production, control prices, grind the faces of the poor, build up enormous fortunes for the trust funds, *elect Governors and Presidents, own the Attorney-General of the United States, purchase Legislatures and Congresses*, and hold high carnival while the dance of death goes merrily on and people starve, and rot and die all over the land." [Emphasis added. – V.C.]

This was only one of many similar statements from Southern and Western Populists. In some cases they quoted actual amounts spent by the Rockefellers, Vanderbilts, Jay Cookes, etc. in buying legislatures.

Thirty-five years after the Populist period, Franklin Roosevelt did say – privately – to Harold Ickes, his Secretary of the Interior that he could "buy any whole state legislature for a million dollars" (which was considerably more than Vanderbilt, etc. had to spend in the 19th Century on any one oc-

casion, even in the U.S. Congress). But FDR's comment was a very indirect way of showing that corporations owned the legislators, and it was not made publicly. Furthermore, it only referred to the *corruption* of U.S. lawmakers, not to their fundamental subservience to big business.

The historian, John D. Hicks, wrote in his "The Populist Revolt" that "It is not unfair to say that normally the railroads – sometimes a single road – dominated the political situation in every Western state. ... Beyond a doubt whole legislatures were bought and sold. ... In the South, the sins that the roads were held to have committed differed in degree, perhaps, but not much in kind, from the sins of the Western roads."

And in *Alabama*, railroads were as big a thing as anywhere else in the South.

"Railroad building increased in Alabama," says W.E.B. DuBois in "Black Reconstruction." "In 1860 there were 743 miles; in 1867, 851 miles. In 1871-72, 1,697 miles were completed, with other lines in construction. The cost of the miles completed, with equipment, was over $60,000,000."

Thus, even during Reconstruction, during the period of greatest freedom and relative self-rule for Black labor, the basis for railroad domination of the Alabama legislature was being laid – and incidentally, also the basis for the alliance between Northern capital and big Southern landholders, an alliance that was to be cemented over the crushed bodies of Black labor.

The question the "Populist" Wallace has to answer, if he wants the title Populist at all, is this: Has he, as Governor, chased the railroads out of the Alabama legislature (that is the railroad lawyers who are legislators) – or even tried to do so? Has he taken on the Tennessee Coal and Iron Co. (giant *subsidiary of U.S. Steel*), which has the huge plant at Bessemer just outside of Birmingham? As Governor, does he govern the big textile corporations, the timber and paper interests, with their hundreds of thousands of acres of Alabama land and their virtual ownership of the Alabama towns and villages where his votes come from?

Does he complain that these corporations really govern the Alabama he is supposed to govern? That is what the Populist governors of Colorado and Kansas did in the 1890's, but you can bet that no Democratic, Republican – or "American-Independent" (Wallace's 1968 party) – governor will ever do that.

The only difference between the big business rule of the legislatures and the country 80 years ago and today is this: that whereas the big railroads and

other corporations had to *bribe* the legislatures in state and national bodies at that time, nowadays they groom them and pass on them *in advance*. Whole legislatures are not usually bought and sold today, except on secondary or third-rate questions, like passing a special insurance law, or getting special favors for some relatively small clique of oil billionaires, etc. This is because the law-makers are *already owned* by a big business that is no longer challenged by the Populism of small business.

Bribery still goes on, of course. But when Nelson Rockefeller himself a member of the richest family in the country, can be governor of the wealthiest state in the country (which would have been impossible in the days of Populism), it is obvious that the underlings and ordinary legal representatives of the Rockefellers, DuPonts, Morgans, Mellons, etc. have all the important political jobs. And those who only wish they were direct top representatives of these billionaires have to jump the political hoop for them in small-time legislatures and governorships like those of Alabama.

CHAPTER 4

The manipulation of money wasn't the half of it!

The fascistic Wallace and even the liberal McGovern cover up the fact that the basic rulers of the country are the big corporations. They cover up the fact that no election can by itself possibly get the corporations out of that rulership. But the original Populists were in the fight precisely because they saw the corporations in the process of taking over and were so indignant about it and desperate that they revealed it to everybody. The enemy was clearly marked out. It was talked about in every country store and written in capital letters on the pages of every *Populist* newspaper (and there were hundreds of them!).

However, the Populists also created a false enemy for themselves which caused a lot of confusion and ultimately had a great deal to do with their defeat. This was their concept of money and the monetary system.

The Populists thought that the source of their oppression was the government's use of *gold* as the money standard. They wanted to use silver, since this was more plentiful and they thought that money would be easier to get, debts would be easier to pay back, etc. etc.

The wage workers of today have a better theory of money. Without thinking very much about it, they don't really care whether they get paid in gold, silver, or paper, as long as they get enough to buy the things they want. In fact, they would not mind even if they got paid in *peanuts,* just so long as they got *enough* peanuts. The real issue, workers suspect, is how many peanuts the boss cheats the workers out of and keeps for himself.

While this peanut theory does not solve all the theoretical and historical problems about money and currency, it is much superior to the free silver theory of the Populists. And it tends to guarantee that the workers' movement of the future will not destroy itself over a battle about using silver instead of gold – or sheep, wampum, copper, cattle, etc. for money.

The "funny-money" theories of the Populists were wrong. But the situation that gave rise to them was not funny.

The price of cotton had gone down from a dollar a pound during the Civil War to 7 cents in the 1890s. The price of wheat made a similar catastrophic decline. Corn went to 10 cents a bushel in Kansas in 1889 and was often used instead of coal.

The farmers were told that the cause of all this was "over-production." But they saw the bankers getting richer and richer, while during much of the eighties and in the depression of the nineties, city workers could not buy the wheat, corn or cotton, because half of them had no jobs and the other half had no money. The farmers and many others thought the *money* system of the bankers was to blame for this.

The government had inflated the money during and shortly after the Civil War by getting huge loans from the bankers. After the war, the bankers demanded repayment in hard cash – i.e. gold. This gave a big profit to the bankers as it stabilized the money but also deflated it. Farmers who had borrowed money in the 1860s, or even later (and they *all* borrowed), had to pay it back in the '70s, '80s, and '90s in a currency that was often worth twice as much as the currency they had borrowed. The farmer who had borrowed the equivalent of a thousand bushels of wheat or a thousand pounds of cotton found himself paying back two thousand bushels or pounds and sometimes much more – with interest on top of that.

More fundamental than the money-tinkering was the fact that the new (and expensive) farm machinery was making wheat easier to produce. And the constant opening of new lands was creating a greater supply of wheat, which consequently tumbled in price. Add to this the fact that Western wheat lands were not as productive as Eastern lands and the railroads drained more than half the price of the wheat – or cotton – in freight charges, and you have some good reasons for the almost revolutionary anger of the Populists against railroads, Washington and Wall Street.

Since the great depression of the 1890s threw millions out of work there was additional reason for lower prices and at the same time a fellow feeling between poor farmers and poor city workers in the face of such catastrophe. Although then, as now, the great farmer base of Populism – West and South – wanted *higher* prices, and propertyless laborers wanted *lower* prices,

the most militant leaders of the working people lined up with the farmer-Populists in the conviction that they were all fighting the same enemy – the Wall Street monopoly corporations and the big bankers behind them.

In the North and East there were big and bloody strikes in the late '80s and early '90s. The farm people who were generally too poor themselves to exploit any labor other than their own and their children's, were sympathetic to the labor struggles, already identifying the enemies of labor with their own. The most advanced of the unionized industrial laborers joined in with the Populists and ran powerful campaigns in several states.

Indeed, says Anna Rochester, in the "History of American Populism:"

> "Wage workers were the first to move at this time toward independent political action. Independent state parties, variously named and chiefly made up of trade unionists, Knights of Labor and Greenbackers, entered the 1886 elections in 13 Northern states. .... Union labor tickets were nominated for local elections in 59 places. These included New York, Chicago, and Milwaukee, where independent labor candidates put up a stiff fight against the old parties,"

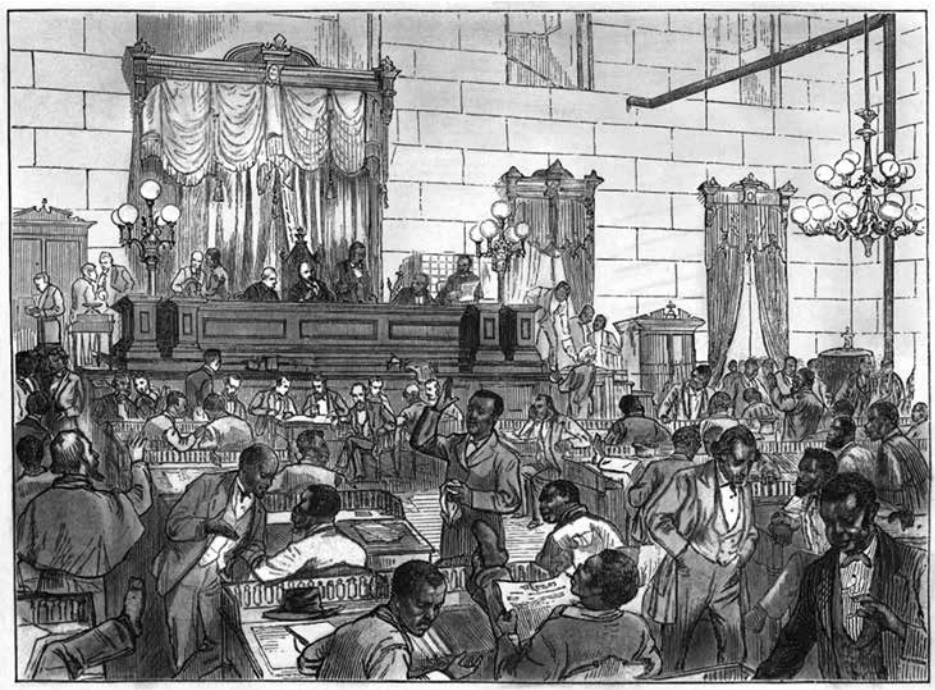
Since the United States itself had been populated with small producers, with 80 or 90% of the people working on the land for most of the 19th Century, it was hardly surprising that the mass and leadership of the Populist movement was of small farmer character. But the movement swept up along with it most of the other radicals of the times in towns and cities as well.

Many socialists, such as Henry Demarest Lloyd, first writer to seriously expose the Rockefellers, and Edward Bellamy, author of the long-popular "Looking Backward," enthusiastically supported them. Eugene Debs, not yet a socialist, was a powerful ally, leading the embattled railroad workers in armed struggles against the companies and the state. The "single-taxers" blocked formally with the Populists in at least one major election. Henry George, the uncompromising advocate of free land, ran for Mayor of New York City ahead of the Republican Theodore Roosevelt. But George lost to the Tammany Democrat by a very small – and suspicious – plurality.

The single-taxers believed in the public ownership of all land, including especially the great ranches, timberlands, oil wells, mines, expensive city business districts, etc. on the very logical theory that it was only the presence and work of society that gave the land any price at all and therefore society should own it.

Among other tendencies who supported the Populists were the Knights of Labor who were generally more radical than the leaders of the American Federation of Labor. Unlike the AFL, they had many local union chapters in the South – some all-Black, some Black and white. At one time there were 90,000 Black members out of a total of 500,000 North and South. The Knights ran their own candidates in some states and supported the Populists in others.

The American Federation of Labor under the leadership of William Gompers had already begun to take its anti-political position, which in reality was one of accepting the corporate rule of the country and has now degenerated into a crude electioneering for slightly "lesser-evil" candidates of big business. But even the AFL wasn't quite so tame in those days as it is now. Its convention called for nationalization of railroads and communications both in 1892 and 1893, although it did not endorse the People's Party.



Black and white representatives in the South Carolina legislature in 1877. This was at the end of Reconstruction, just before the anti-Black counterrevolution.

The United Mineworkers, quite sympathetic to the Populists, took the socialist position at its convention in 1894 in favor of "the collective ownership of all means of production and distribution."

All these labor groups were small compared to nowadays, however, and of course extremely persecuted.

Even less popular, if not more persecuted, than labor at the time were the women's suffrage and women's rights groups. They too supported the Populists for the most part, and vice versa. While organized labor was almost exclusively male, the farm movement counted many outstanding women in its ranks. The farm women were used to playing an important role in both the work and the management of the farms, large ones as well as small. And their status of partnership with their husbands led naturally to their expressing the politics of the movement with equal and often greater eloquence than the men.

The Prohibitionists, who were more radical at that time than is generally understood today, also blocked with the Populists. Most of the anti-liquor fighters were motivated by a concern for the advancement of labor, the self-education of the poor, etc. which was of course incompatible with getting drunk after a 12-hour day at work.

The one great section of the people, whose *basic interests* were neglected by the majority of the Populists, however, was the Black people. Great as was the *support* of Black people for Populism and great as was the effort of Southern white Populists to break down the political system of "white supremacy," the fundamental social needs of the Black people as a whole at that time were misunderstood or ignored by the Populist movement. (The basic social need, of course, was land for the landless.)

Naturally, the heritage of racism had something to do with this. But the real cause lay in the class relations between the great corporations, the big Southern landholders, the merchants and bankers, the mostly white small farmers, the mostly Black tenant farmers – and at the bottom of the whole pyramid, the *Black laborers*, who at that time were mostly plantation laborers – especially in the Black Belt.

As many as 150 freedmen were massacred during Reconstruction at a meeting in the Colfax, Lousiana Courthouse. This illustration by Charles Harvey Weigall, is captioned "The Louisiana Murders – Gathering the Dead and Wounded." It was published in Harper's Weekly in 1873. Survivors of the Colfax Massacre tend to the dead and wounded while two men on horses, defenders of the slavocracy, watch over them.

Photo: Rice University/ OpenStax College

CHAPTER 5

Poor whites tied down by the Black lynch rope

There has always been a deep and complicated struggle or potential struggle in the South. The struggle itself is over the livelihood of the poor, the working people – and over the super-profits for the rich, that is the landowners and big bosses of industry. But the struggle is extremely sharpened by the fact that the poorest and hardest-working people are almost invariably Black. And it is further complicated by the additional fact that poor whites have *nearly* always been misled by the rich whites to solidarize with their own oppressors on the basis of being the same race, rather than joining with their fellow-oppressed, who are of a different race.

This has gone on for over two hundred years and was an old story even before the Civil War. But since Reconstruction and since the advent of Northern capital into the South, it got even more complicated and much more subtle than non-Southerners generally think.

There had to be a political system for keeping the poor whites in line just as there was a terror system for keeping the still-poorer Blacks totally suppressed. The political system after Reconstruction could be summed up as *The Democratic Party*.

The Populist break from that party was therefore a much greater wrench and more loaded with revolutionary possibilities than the radical politics of the West.

Of course George Wallace broke with the Democratic Party in 1968. But the reason for the Populist break in the 1890s was diametrically opposite to Wallace's reason, especially as far as "white supremacy" was concerned.

Today the Democratic Party has been compelled to run Black candidates in many areas, to sponsor mild civil rights bills, etc., etc. And Wallace's idea of a third party (as revealed in 1968) was to end all this, to build a party that is

wholly white supremacist and segregationist to the core, to restore the absolute rule of the slaveholder type and to re-establish lynch law as the rule of the land.

Party of white supremacy

After Reconstruction, the Democratic Party was *The* party of white supremacy and that was the slogan on which it won its elections and maintained itself in power. In *Alabama* this was first done in the election of 1874, two and a half years before the formal end of Reconstruction and the withdrawal of Union troops from the last outposts of revolutionary enforcement of Black equality.

The 1874 Democratic Party election slogan in Alabama was "White Supremacy or Death!" And with that slogan the big landowners made an alliance with their natural enemies, the poor white tenant farmers and squatters, and crushed the revolutionary democracy of the Black freedmen who had formerly been allied with a large section of these same poor whites.

"The chief characteristic of Reconstruction in Alabama," says Dr. Du Bois, "was the direct fight for mastery between the poor whites and the planters." This fight was so furious that at the beginning of the Civil War several Alabama counties with predominantly small farms at first opposed the Secession and declared for the Union. Winston County in the northwest part of the state *seceded from the Confederacy*. But its rebellion was later crushed and it had to get into line.

The big planters couldn't possibly have succeeded in their maneuver without the use of force and terror. They continued this terror long after the first electoral victory of the post-Reconstruction Democrats. But to do this, they had somehow to win over the poor whites.

> "The planters and poor whites after their first enmity early made alliance in Alabama," continues the author of "Black Reconstruction," "and their concentrated social weight descended on whites who dared to vote with the Blacks. Such persons were warned and attacked until they fled the state or made peace with the new masters. Later, Northern capital poured into the poor white belt to develop coal and iron [*these were the interests that sold out to the Morgans in 1907 – V.C.*]. Convict labor was widely used and exploitation developed, with labor divided by race, and helpless."

The "whites who dared to vote with the Blacks" in the period Dr. Du Bois speaks about, then voted Republican because that party was still seriously

defending equal rights – at the time – and seriously opposing the big planters. But as Northern capital moved into the South and looked for agents to carry out its needs, lo and behold, it soon found the big planters, the former slaveholders whom it had just made war upon, and then made a pact with them to let them rule the South so long as they would be loyal to Wall Street and share the booty with it.

In the process of doing this, of course they betrayed the Black people back into semi-slavery, but what is even less understood is that they also enslaved a large number of poor whites and even middle class whites as they made the South a semi-colony of the North.

Populist Third Party

The creation of a third party in the '80s and '90s therefore, not only signified an attempt of the poorer whites to break out of this colonial status and to challenge their colonial stooge-masters, the big landowners, but it meant, of necessity, an attempt to include the Black people in the new revolt, too.

Thus the Populist third party of the '80s and '90s, quite opposite of Wallace's third party movement, was a thrust *toward* Black representation instead of away from it. It automatically raised the question of the Black vote. And white Populist leaders in every Southern state except for the exceptionally racist South Carolina, went to great efforts to get out the Black vote and win it for Populism.

This was not merely opportunism on their part, although it was connected with their desire for victory. In the course of the struggles they tried hard to educate the poor whites to the concept of equal rights – most likely with much more success than conservative white historians have taken the trouble to reveal.

Tom Watson, who was a congressman, and editor of a string of Populist newspapers, often returned to this subject, calling upon the whites to give up their prejudices in a way that very few mass leaders have done in this country since that time.

> "Both the old parties have done this thing until they have constructed as perfect a 'slot machine' as the world ever saw. Drop the old worn nickel of the 'party slogan' into the slot, and the machine does the rest. You might beseech a Southern white tenant to listen to you upon questions of finance, taxation, transportation; you might demonstrate with mathematical precision that herein lay

Ida B. Wells documented 728 lynchings between 1884 and 1892, based on research by the Chicago Tribune. To campaign against white supremacist terror, she wrote a series of widely circulated articles titled "**Southern Horrors**," which documented false accusations made by the racists. Her courageous anti-lynching crusade was historic.

University of Chicago Library

> the way out of his poverty into comfort; you might have him 'almost persuaded' to the truth, but if the merchant who furnished his farm supplies (at tremendous usury) or the town politician (who never spoke to him except at election time) came along and cried 'Negro rule!' the entire fabric of reason and common sense which you had patiently constructed would fall, and the poor tenant would joyously hug the chains of an actual wretchedness rather than do any experimenting on a question of mere sentiment." (From "The Negro Question in the South," an article in the Populist magazine, *The Arena* of October, 1892.)

Analyzing the economic causes of race discrimination further, but confining himself to examples of tenant farmers (rather than the Black field workers in the big plantations) Watson continued in the same article:

> "The white tenant lives adjoining the colored tenant. Their houses are almost equally destitute of comforts. Their living is confined to bare necessities. They are equally burdened with heavy taxes. They pay the same high rent for gullied and impoverished land.
>
> "They pay enormous prices for farm supplies. Christmas finds them both without any satisfactory return for a year's toil. Dull and unhappy, they both start the plows again when 'New Years' passes.
>
> "Now the People's Party says to these two men, 'You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both.'"

Outside of the reference to the "monetary system," which the Populists thought was the source of all inequality and oppression, this was a striking condemnation of racism and a clear explanation of its causes.

It was no accident, however, that Watson referred to the Black tenant farmer and the white tenant *farmer* and left out the Black plantation *laborer* – whereas he often referred to the rights of *Northern* (white) labor.

CHAPTER 6

It was a different Montgomery, Alabama!

Although both the Western Populists and the Southern Populists sympathized with Northern labor, this was not exactly the case with their attitude to Southern labor. It was clear that Northern labor was fighting against the same Wall Street interests as the Western farmer, the Southern farmer and the Southern tenant farmer. But the case of the Southern laborers was different. These laborers were mainly plantation laborers. Southern Populism, although strong for Black and white voting equality, could not win the Black votes in the Black Belt mainly because they did not champion the *laboring* interests of the Black people.

The Black farmers and tenant farmers were a class very close to the small white farmers, economically speaking. Tom Watson, in the previously quoted speech, was talking to sections of two races which had common interests. But the Black plantation *laborers* who lived and worked in the Black Belt cotton plantations of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, and were more oppressed than anybody else in the South, were not so close to the Populists. And this was only partly because their former slave masters, the plantation owners, found ways to keep them enslaved politically to the Democratic Party.

Although the small white farmers hated the great plantation overlords, some of the bigger white farmers – many of them Populists – employed Black laborers and here and there among the very large owners there was a supporter of the Populists, too.

In fact, Watson himself was a landowner; only he had mostly tenant farmers on his land, which was one reason he was so familiar with their problems. He could identify with these tenants as against the merchants and Wall Street-dominated politicians, but he never called for higher wages or easier piece-work for the Black laborers on the plantations – nor, of course, lower rents or lower shares of the crops for the landlords.

On the other hand, the big landowners had tied up the Black laborers politically in a way that the Populists could not easily unravel. After Reconstruction was defeated, the former big slave owners did not immediately prevent the Black laborers from voting. Instead, they marched them up to the polls and made them vote Democratic.

The plantation owners, although they no longer ran the United States government, were now politically more powerful than ever, compared to the poor whites in the up-country part of the state. Whereas their slaves had once been counted as only three out of five for purposes of representation in Congress, now they were counted *five for five* (because of the Fourteenth Amendment!). So the Black Belt counties were now stronger than the less populated up-country counties where most of the small farmers lived. The catch was that the Black laborers were forced to vote for their bosses.

The white Populists and their Black tenant allies hated this situation and they hated the big plantation owners, who could only do this dirty work because they had the support of the Northern politicians and big businessmen. But outside of the Populist period, the poor white farmers were the slaves of their own racism on this issue as on others.

At the beginning of this period – *on June 24, 1880* – a large delegation of white workers and white farmers met in Montgomery, Alabama, at the state's Greenback Labor Party Convention and took a position firmly opposed to school segregation (74 years before the Supreme Court's "historic" decision!).

Montgomery is now known as "the cradle of the Confederacy" – the political center of human slavery, that is. It is now the seat of the Wallace-led state government, the place where Wallace pledged in his first inaugural speech as governor to carry on the purely "Anglo-Saxon" tradition and called upon the spirit of Jefferson Davis, the president of the slaveholders, to help him maintain "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever."

Yet 82 years before Wallace called for segregation now, tomorrow, etc.; 83 years before he stood "in the schoolhouse door" to prevent a Black man and woman from studying at the state university, the Greenback Labor Populists denounced the decrepit, reactionary, segregated school system that had taken the place of the Reconstruction schools. (The Reconstruction-established institutions were the first public schools in Alabama.) And the Greenback-Labor

convention denounced all government favoritism to railroads, banks and insurance companies, as all Populists did almost routinely at that time.

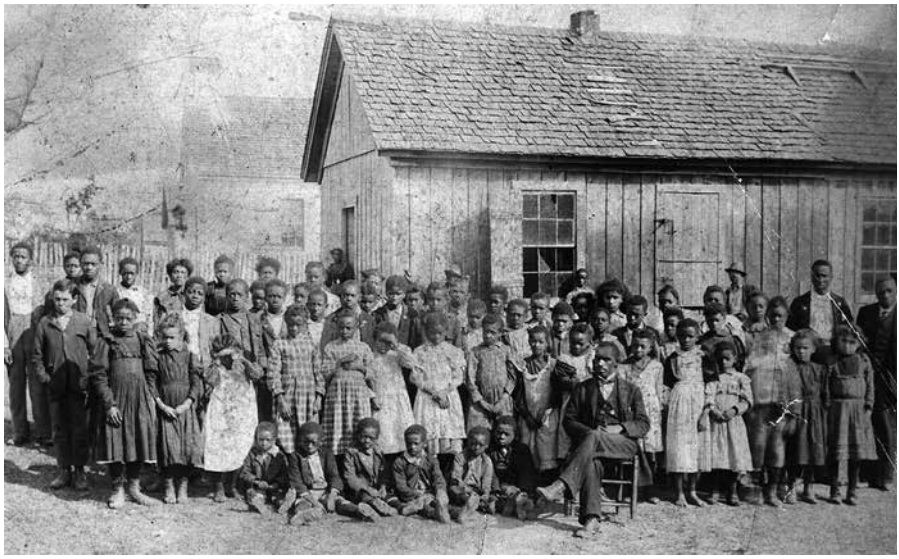
More than this, the convention openly took on the "Bourbons of the South," being one of the very first groups in the North or South to even use that term to describe the big landowners and former slave-owners.

(The original Bourbons in French history were the Royal family and old landed nobility who had "learned nothing and forgotten nothing" after their overthrow in the Great French Revolution. When they made their partial comeback, they tried to be just as dirty and oppressive to the former serfs as their parents and grandparents had been.)

The Greenback-Labor Party called for a voting alliance with the Black plantation laborers as well as the Black tenant farmers. But due to the situation described above this was easier said than done.

But when you consider the present "*Populism*" in Montgomery – the "Populism" of George Wallace – the efforts of the 1880 convention take on a special interest.

And at the height of Populism, in the same city of Montgomery, when the Alabama People's Party held its convention there in 1892 just before getting 46% of the statewide vote, the new party platform declared:



Students in front of a schoolhouse near Shelbyville, Indiana, from the late 1800s.
Photo: Indiana State Library

> "We favor the protection of the colored race in their legal rights and should afford them encouragement and aid in the attainment of a higher civilization and citizenship, that through the means of kindness, fair treatment and just regard for them, a better understanding and more satisfactory condition may exist between the races."

This statement of a large number of Alabama Populists in convention is a far cry from the so-called "*Populism*" of George Wallace. True, it is not exactly a flaming manifesto of Black liberation, either. But considering that many of the white people who voted for it were the same small farmers, hill folk and so-called "red-necks" that Wallace pretends are his main supporters today, the note of paternalism can easily be forgiven. It was an *honest* statement for the unity of the poor of both races and as such it is a hundred times more valuable than the actions of big white liberals of today, who fold up like accordions whenever George Wallace and the Ku Klux Klan take the offensive.

> "This is at last a thinking and a reading people," a Populist said of the Georgia white farmers. "The last four years – the last two campaigns – have been full of education and the people are thinking more freely than they have ever done before. You cannot any longer shake the red flag of Negro supremacy in the faces of the white masses and make them think that life and death and salvation depend upon voting the Democratic ticket. They are thinking for themselves now."

This was in a letter to *The Atlanta Constitution* (an anti-Populist paper) and quoted in *The People's Party Paper of Georgia* on Aug. 11, 1894.

Of course, the writer meant the white people were "thinking for themselves" and would not permit their exploiters to frighten them with the "red flag of Negro supremacy." This represented a negative rather than a positive sense of equality for the Black people. But compared to the sentiments of that great "Populist" George Wallace, it was about as radical as you can get.

CHAPTER 7

Land – and the revolution that didn't happen

The white Populists were land-hungry, especially in the West, where they saw the railroads and ranch-owners grabbing land a million or more acres at a time. But the Southern Black Populists needed land not only as a way of competing with big business and of growing prosperous. They needed it desperately in order to assert their human right to exist at all in the modern world – that is, in order not to sink into the same slavery that existed before the Civil War. This was only vaguely understood among the whites, who confined themselves to supporting the right of Black people to vote and did not stir themselves to make an active alliance to help Black people get the land.

The Colored Alliance (founded in Houston, Texas in 1886) grew to the then prodigious number of 1.25 million members before merging with the previously all-white Southern Alliance a very few years later to become the People's Party. Black people built their organization in nearly all the states of the South, and considering the very great handicaps under which they labored, only the smoldering passion for the land denied them after the Civil War could possibly explain their drive and their organizational successes.

The revolutionary U.S. Freedmen's Bureau had distributed some 800,000 acres to ex-slaves during Reconstruction. But this was relatively very small. It would have come to less than one acre per Black family, had it all been evenly divided. Furthermore, most of this land was taken back by the ex-slaveholders after the 1877 counterrevolution, some of it even before that time.

By 1890 there were over 6 million Black people in the South. According to Dr. Rayford W. Logan in his "Betrayal of the Negro", there were 120,738 *Black-owned* farms in the whole country, most of them in the South. There were three times as many Black *tenant* farmers, says Dr. Logan, as there were owners. Most of the tenant farms, too, were in the South. Few of the inde-

pendent farms could trace their origin to any division of the land – least of all to the revolutionary expropriation of slaveholders' land that never really did take place.

The Colored Alliance must have had its own tempestuous history with inner conflicts and dynamic development. But it was severely handicapped. To begin with, the great majority of members were very poor tenant farmers, and this alone must have prevented them from traveling and organizing in the way many of the white farmers could do, especially those who had middling incomes or better.

This situation was a little like that of the modern labor movement. The almost lily-white leadership of U.S. labor today is a characteristic of the top ranks, the high-paid leadership – that is, the labor bureaucracy. But on the picket lines and in plant stoppages and wildcats, the leadership of the *struggle* is often Black or partially Black. This is much more common than outsiders would expect in light of the general racism and repression of this country. The phenomenal organization of the Colored Alliance required a similar and even greater initiative from the rank and file. And this initiative must have been applied, although perhaps in a hidden way.

The white Populists had hundreds of *unpaid* leaders, of course, infinitely different from the modern labor bureaucracy in *that* respect. They had publicists, lawyers, editors, etc., as well as country-wide organizers and speakers who went from town to town and state to state. When the Black and white Populists merged, it was more or less inevitable that the united leadership would have been a white one – especially given the fact that the whites had not figured out any basic *social* approach to Black people and were not especially sensitive to the deeper needs of the more revolutionary Black people.

It was hard for the more impoverished Black farmers to provide the kind of leadership the Populists then had, and the few who had the education and the finances for it probably found the general racism of society too difficult to contend with, in spite of the improved attitude of the white Populists.

Class interests of Black farmers

In Texas, however, two Black leaders were on the state committee of the United People's Party, and united rallies of Black and white voters were addressed by Black speakers from time to time, as was also the case in Georgia,

even before the merger of the Colored Alliance with the white one. (This was probably true in other places, too. But the published records are inadequate and unclear on it.)

The Colored Alliance tried to do what the white Populists could not possibly have done – and that was to penetrate the ranks of Black labor on big plantations and win them as converts to Populism. Had this been successfully accomplished, the future of the whole movement would have been assured. The solid Black vote, plus a large fraction of the white vote, would have accumulated constant majorities and the Bourbons would have been parliamentarily defeated. And this – together with more concrete struggles – would have raised the question of land and equality for Black as well as the white people, as it gave the poor whites a chance to get representation, along with Black people, in the legislatures.

But this did not happen.

Farmstead with sharecropper carrying water in East Carroll Parish, Transylvania, Louisiana, January 1939 Photo: Lee, Russell / Library of Congress

First, because of the Bourbons, by a combination of terror and deceit, reinforced by their economic power over the poor plantation laborers, made the Black field workers continue voting Democratic and defeated the Populist party in practically all elections.

Second – and more important – because the white Populists, although they desired the votes of the Black laborers, did not support them as a class. The Black tenant farmers and the white tenant farmers had the same enemy in the merchants, the railroads and the banks. And they both sympathized with Northern labor because it fought the same railroads and banks that were oppressing the farmers. But the attitude to Southern labor – Black labor – was different. And they did not organize against their landlords as landlords, partly because some of these landlords were in alliance with the tenants, sometimes even leading the tenants – against the big money people of the North.

The tenants, oppressed as they were, also shared the illusions of the owner-farmers in the West, that they could make money and get bigger farms if only they could get the railroads and banks off their necks, and they could do this by getting Populist candidates into Congress.

However, the Black tenant farmers, being so dirt-poor and also being Black, could identify more with the Black laborers of the big plantations. Furthermore, the Black tenant farmers being more oppressed generally and more confined to tenant farming than the poor whites, were also more land-hungry and more unanimous against the big Bourbon landholders, still hoping for the revolutionary division of the land that Reconstruction had promised, but failed to give them. They must have seen the Black laborers as a powerful ally in any struggle for the land. And they must have seen this much more clearly than the white tenant farmers did, even though these particular whites would have gained nearly as much by such an alliance.

> "Once the Colored Farmers' Alliance proposed to call a general strike of Negro cotton pickers," says Woodward. "*The Progressive Farmer,* paper of Colonel L.L. Polk (white), president of the National Alliance did 'not hesitate to advise our farmers to leave their cotton in the field rather than pay more than 50 cents per hundred to have it picked.' The Negro bretheren were attempting to 'better their conditions at the expense of their white brethren. Reforms should not be in the interest of one portion of our farmers at the expense of another.' "

This unbelievable callousness (Polk's paper was generally quite radical and pro-Black) becomes more believable when you consider the *class* character of the Populist movement and the fact that it was a farmers' movement and somewhat wealthier farmers were almost automatically in the lead of it. Their radicalism, which attained almost revolutionary fervor, was directed against the Wall Street plunderers, but was by no means in favor of an egalitarian society or a country ruled by wage workers.

Ex-slaves sold out

It should be added that the unnatural situation of the Black plantation laborers themselves was the result of a previous sellout – the sellout that ended Reconstruction. If the great slave-operated estates had been divided up so that each ex-slave family could have had "forty acres and a mule" (this was the bare minimum proposed by the white radicals of the North) and own them, the whole situation would have been different and the Bourbon class would not even have been in existence, economically speaking.

> ‘’To have given each one of the million Negro free families a 40 acre freehold," says Dr. DuBois, "would have made a basis of real democracy in the United States that might easily have transformed the modern world."

He discusses in "Black Reconstruction" the way the landed Bourbons would have been decisively beaten by such a procedure and the consequent alliance of Black labor and white labor that would necessarily have taken place 20 years before the Populist revolt.

But of course it was precisely for this reason that Northern capital made its alliance with the Southern Bourbons so quickly after the Civil War, even in fact, while the more radical Northern small businessmen and farmers were still supporting the Reconstruction program and their Congressional representatives still demanding "40 acres and a mule" for the freed slaves.

> "As early as 1865 and 1866," DuBois declares, "there was evident in Georgia a transition of leadership from the old landed aristocracy to the new commercial class."

And it was inevitable that this class would be bound by a thousand ties to the big capitalists of the North.

Du Bois shows that the new reactionary alliance was consummated well *before* the big sellout of 1877 when Northern troops were removed from the whole South apparently in return for Wall Street's Republican Presidential candidate being virtually given the election by the new Southern section of the ruling class. "When the Democratic Party secured a majority in Congress in 1874," he says, "the majority sat under the dictatorship of big business."

It was this dictatorship, already buttressed by the big Southern landholders who had been given stock in railroads and were collaborating in new business enterprises, that the Southern Populists were fighting so furiously – and so blindly, two decades later.

Where the poorer whites understood Wall Street, they did not fully understand its method of ruling the new South. And where they understood the method and conquered their race prejudice, they could not solve the class contradiction between poor farmer and plantation laborer. Having failed to consummate the first alliance with the Black revolution by a division of land after the Civil War (which would of course have been a boon to poor whites as well as Blacks), they failed to consummate the second alliance (during the Populist movement) with a support of the demands of Black wage labor against the big farmers along with a division of the land.

Thus, the once-defeated slave-masters were twice strengthened. And the former Northern enemy of the slave-owner, the former "emancipator" of the slave, now the overlord of the whole South, was still further strengthened as the whole system bore down upon the poor Black and white farmers and still more upon the Black plantation laborers.

Thus, the long-delayed revolutionary solution of the land question and much else was delayed still further by the failure of the small-owner and small-tenant forces of Populism – desperate though they were – to form the fighting alliance with Black labor that would have been so beneficial to nearly all concerned.

CHAPTER 8

They were called "communist"

The bitter cry of the Populists against Wall Street land-grabbers in the West and the Northern exploiters in the South used much of the phraseology of communism, even though they did not really advocate economic equality and did not want to nationalize the land, much less the whole factory system. They expressed the agony of the mostly white farmers and of the mostly white, at that time, terribly oppressed Northern laborers. The Populists' alliance with the Black farmers was weakened by their attitude toward Black *labor*.

But they did politically oppose the whole repressive and exploitative apparatus in Washington and Wall Street.

George Wallace and other pro-corporation demagogues have occasionally made little sideswipes at the corporate plunderers in modern times. But they have never mounted a consistent campaign along this line as the Populists did. This is not merely because they are liars while the Populists were honest people. It is because the Populist politicians were part of a genuine mass movement against the monopolies and their government, whereas the Wallaces, Eastlands, Maddoxes, etc. are the most willing political servants of these same corporations, but are compelled to disguise their true role in order to get the votes of the (white) victims of these corporations.

The Populists never called the opponents of the government "anarchists" or "communists" as Wallace now calls the anti-war protesters and the fighters for Black Freedom. But the racist Wallaces of that day, the advocates of repression and low wages, were always at the throats of the Populists, calling them such names. The Populists answered their enemies by saying that the corporations – the Wall Street oppressors – and the President of the United States himself, were the "anarchists." Sometimes they half-seriously accepted the name "communist" for themselves, somewhat in the same way the early

United Auto Workers and other CIO militants did when they were accused of communism as they fought for a living wage.

The Populists particularly attacked President Grover Cleveland who was as determined in his repression of the white Pullman strikers as Nixon or Johnson has been in sending troops against the Black people in the United States or the Asian people in Vietnam.

C. Vann Woodward says in his biography of Tom Watson:

> "When the anarchist, Emma Goldman, was jailed for daring [in the words of Watson – V.C.] 'to denounce the damnable system which makes a God-imaged men of less value to society than a St. Bernard dog,' he contrasted her offense with the 'immeasurable disaster which stalks behind the anarchy of Grover Cleveland [and Senators – V.C.] John Carlisle and John Sherman.' A cartoon illustrated the article, headed, 'The Anarchist Who Does the Most Damage,' which depicted the President, surrounded by Gould, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt and Carnegie, hurling bombs at the crumbling edifice of 'Jeffersonian Democracy.' The arrest of the leaders of Coxey's Army of Protest ... reminded him that 'Carnegie stole two hundred thousand dollars from the government, and Cleveland did not prosecute him as the law requires.' "

Populists versus the rich

It is hard to imagine George Wallace styling a Rockefeller as a "bomb-thrower," calling Nixon names for shooting and burning the Vietnamese, or telling him to arrest the steel barons instead of the strikers or the youth who march on Washington.

The Populists understood very well that nobody ever really earns a million dollars. They had too often seen the robberies at first hand by which the corporate scoundrels got rich. They had experienced too much of a fleecing from their own backs to have any naive faith in the honesty or good will of the big bosses. Consequently the name-calling did not bother them in the least, and they took the offensive on this front as on others.

When Mary Elizabeth Lease, the Kansas farm Populist, famous for telling the farmers to "raise less corn and more hell," was attacked in Georgia along with two other Populists as "this trio of communists and South-haters," she replied,

> "You may call me an anarchist, a socialist or a communist, I care not, but I hold to the theory that if one man has not enough to eat three times a day and another man has $25 million, that last man has something that belongs to the first." (Macon County, Ga. *Telegraph* of Aug.11, 1891)

Tom Watson said around the same time:

> "Let me show you how communist and paternal our platform is. We are the people. We have created the corporations. They are our legal offspring. Shall it be said that the servant is above the master, or the child above the father? ... Will you Knights of Labor help the farmers of the field in their fight on the common enemy? ... What of this cry of class legislation? ... Our statue books are filled with legislation of capital at the expense of labor. .... If we must have class legislation, as we always have had it and always will have it, what class is more entitled to it than the largest class, the working class?"

Watson denounced the system of law that "tears a tenant from his family and puts him in chains and stripes because he sells cotton for something to eat and leaves his rent unpaid, and which at the same time cannot punish its railroad kings," and said it was "weak unto rottenness." This system deserved to die, he said, "and it will die, just as certainly as there are enough brave men left to denounce the system and arouse the people to tear it down."

Coxey's 1894 protest march of unemployed men in Massillon, Ohio. They marched to Washington D.C. to demand jobs for unemployed workers on public works, such as building roads.

Photo: Massillon Museum Archives

Wallace's anti-communism

Now the alleged "*Populist*" Wallace might well say that Washington politicians are "weak unto rottenness." But according to him that is because the leaders are "soft on communism" and soft on poor welfare victims. Wallace advocates "tearing to pieces," all right, but tearing whom? – The Black people! Wallace would not harm one hair of any of the Morgan family's heads – certainly not for as long as they own the state of Alabama and all the politicians in it!

> "The breakdown of law and order," said Wallace in the 1968 campaign, "is the result of the activities of a few activists, revolutionaries, anarchists and Communists." And in the 1972 campaign he remarked that his own Democratic Party's mild program on taxes and welfare was too "socialistic."

Coxey's "Industrial Army" in Massillon, Ohio. Photo: Massillon Museum Archives

If the old-time white Populists failed to make the revolutionary alliance with the Black Populists and Black laborers that they should have made, they nevertheless did stand up against the banks and the real enemies of the Black people. And where "Populist" Wallace attacks the Wall Street Establishment for being too "socialistic," the real Populists attacked it for what it really was.

Mrs. Lease, the mother of four children, a tireless speaker and a never-flagging friend of the oppressed, quite a different kind of Populist than George Wallace, expressed the conscious sentiments of literally millions of people in the United States during the Populist period when she said:

> "Wall Street runs the country. It is no longer the government of the people, by the people and for the people, but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street and for Wall Street. The great common people of this country are slaves, and monopoly is the master. The West and South are bound and prostrate before the manufacturing East. Money rules, and our Vice President is a London banker.
>
> ''Our laws are the output of a system which clothes rascals in robes and honest men in rags. The parties lie to us and the political speakers mislead us ... the politicians say we suffer from overproduction. Overproduction, when 10,000 little children, so statistics tell us, starve to death every year in the United States and over 100,000 shop girls in New York are forced to sell their virtue for the bread their niggardly wages deny them. … Kansas suffers from two great robbers, the Santa Fe Railroad and the loan companies. The common people are robbed to enrich their masters. …
>
> "There are 30 men in the United States whose aggregate wealth is over one and one-half billion dollars. There are half a million looking for work. … We want money, land and transportation. … We want the accursed foreclosure system wiped out. Land equal to a tract 30 miles wide and 90 miles long has been foreclosed and bought in by loan companies of Kansas in a year. We will stand by our homes and stay by our firesides by force if necessary, and we will not pay our debts to the loan-shark companies until the government pays its debts to us. The people are at bay; let the bloodhounds of money who have dogged us thus far beware!"
>
> (Quoted in "Kansas and Kansans" by Elizabeth Barr)

Outside agitators and Wall Street

Mrs. Lease was a Westerner, a Kansas farmer, and was slandered as a "South-hater" by the anti-Populist Southern newspapers. Thus the old cry against the "outside agitator" was given a special Southern twist and she was baited as a "Westerner.'

But the truth was that the more radical and bitter struggle against Wall Street was not in the West but precisely in the South.

> "Political campaigns in the North," says an unnamed veteran of Alabama Populism quoted by Woodward, "even at their highest pitch of contention and strife, were as placid as pink tea in comparison with those years of political combat in the South." And the historian adds his own observation: "Taking into comparative account the violence of the passions unloosed by the conflict, the actual bloodshed and physical strife, one is prepared to give assent to that judgment."

One Populist paper published in Augusta, Georgia, was called *The Revolution* and just below this title on the masthead was the quotation, "Not a Revolt, It's a Revolution." This was a quote from the apocryphal courtier who told Louis XVI what was really going on over at the Bastille in 1789.

Woodward continues:

> "Whenever this note of revolution – bloodless or otherwise – was sounded in the movement – and that was not infrequently – it usually came, out of the South. Throughout the history of the movement a large element among the Western farmers was afraid of this tendency in their Southern allies. The Northerners were generally more content with gradual reform. A hostile Kansas editor warning of the preponderance of the South exhibited more perspicacity than he knew when he branded the whole alliance movement a 'rebel yell.' "

Mary Elizabeth Lease was populist from Kansas whose speeches helped to further the farmers and sharecroppers movement starting in the 1880's and 1890's.

Lease said "If one man has not enough to eat three times a day and another has $25 million, that last man has something that belongs to the first"

Library of Congress

Yes, but the rebel yell of the 1880s and 1890s was not a simple repetition of the battle cry of slaveholders deafening slavery during the Civil War. It was not against the same radical Republican Party and its more or less revolutionary industrial backers who had led the war against slavery; it was against the now already reactionary big business bankers and corrupt politicians who had betrayed the freed slaves and were now exploiting the white farmers, too. These white farmers now wanted an alliance with former slaves; and the white rulers of the South feared this development as much as they had feared the ex-slaves themselves during Reconstruction!

In order to emphasize the misunderstanding about the Populist period and its relation to the modern South, let us look once again at the liberals' criticism of George Wallace.

Marshall Frady, a biographer of the Alabama demagogue, weeps about Wallace's "stand in the schoolhouse door," because he is afraid it inspires the whole white South to side with Wallace. The stand, says Frady with sad conviction, was Wallace's "finest hour." And then he adds still more seriously "It was even more; in personally striking the pose of hopeless [!] defiance, he sensed he was on the verge of becoming the apotheosis of the will of his people."

Who was defeated in the Civil War?

Apart from implying that the white poor are in the same class as the well-heeled bigshot business politician, apart from misunderstanding the class character of the Southern whites and their differentiation and potential differentiation into opposing camps, Frady is also wrong on his basic premises. Like most other liberals, he assumes that the poor whites are still trying to get even for the defeat of their slave-owning oppressors in the Civil War.

The defeat, when viewed as a defeat of the whole white South, may still rankle, even in the breasts of the poorest whites. But if so, who and what makes it rankle? That is the question.

To answer the question, it is necessary to ask who profits most from segregation, who profits most from the division of the working class along racial lines?

It is not the spontaneous yearning for the times of Scarlet O'Hara and the mint julep-drinking, pistols-at-dawn fraternity of parasitic plantation owners that winds the clocks in the South and fires up the adrenalin of the white

poor. It is the calculated propaganda, the cradle-to-grave indoctrination injected into them by a class far more powerful than the plantation owners ever were or ever will be. Behind the sheets of the Ku Klux Klan are not the ghosts of Beauregard and Stonewall Jackson, but the living puppet-masters of Wall Street – the money-barons of the North, who set the Klansmen into motion. It is they who rule the South – and far more thoroughly than they did in the days of Populism. They run the railroads, the company towns, the buses, the airplanes, the utilities, the big newspapers, and even whole chains of "country" newspapers. It is they who created the Black stereotypes in the movies (for they own the movies). It is they who shaped and still shape the minds of the Southern white masses.

But how did they ever defeat such a promising movement as that of the Populists? How and why did the movement fail? How did it disappear so completely from the American scene and become so forgotten that a racist, liar, and faker like George Wallace and an Establishment liberal like George McGovern can both be called "Populists" with hardly any question or discussion about the matter?

A political cartoon from an 1896 issue of Puck Magazine showing Populist candidate William Jennings Bryan at the head of Coxey's ragtag army, eyeing the White House.
Image: Puck/ Library of Congress

CHAPTER 9

The death of Populism and the rebirth of the Klan

History books tell us that the People's Party was maneuvered out of existence by the Democrats' luring its supporters back into the fold under the leadership of the oratorical semi-Populist, William Jennings Bryan. This demagogic superstar ran for president on the Democratic ticket in 1896, as he also did in 1900 and 1908. Many were the Populists who raged and wept over the sellout (*i.e. the sellout of the Democrats co-opting the whole Populist Party*). But the merger did go through and the People's Party never really revived after that, except to run more or less token candidates.

Bryan, who took only the least important and most fallacious part of the Populist program – the demand for "free silver" – lost to Wall Street's eighteen karat gold candidate, William McKinley. McKinley had the backing of Rockefeller's personal political manager, Mark Hanna, who lined up practically every corporation and trust in the United States and even assessed them each a small percentage of their profits in the highly organized campaign to defeat Bryan.

Big business could have taken over Bryan in the long run and used him in one way or another. (They had Wilson appoint him to the crucial job of Secretary of State just before World War I.) But in 1896 it was clear that the big undigested Populist strength in the Democratic Party might well act as a check on the now rampaging big capitalists, who had ambitious plans to increase the monopoly control of the country and to expand it into the rest of the world, too.

The very fury of the Wall Street campaign against Bryan increased the credibility of the *Democratic Party* (the party of white supremacy and slavery!) in the eyes of the city masses as an anti-big business party, while large numbers of them voted Republican out of fear of their bosses or as a capitulation to the hysteria against the "radical" Bryan.

Furthermore, although the Democrats were defeated nationally in the election of 1896, they were enormously strengthened in the turbulent South by the capitulation of the Populist Party. And the resurgence of the Democratic Party helped to reestablish all-out white supremacy.

But now it was no longer a case of the Democratic planters buying or forcing the votes of Black laborers on the plantations and grudgingly permitting Black tenant farmers to vote Populist or Republican. It was a case, rather, of eliminating all Black votes by poll tax, impossible literacy tests – and unvarnished terror. It was a case of unrestrained lynch law – imposed by the revived Ku Klux Klan, which was reorganized in 1915, exactly a half-century after the Civil War, to exert its torture and violence on behalf of a very different ruling class than the one which had been defeated fifty years earlier.

Indeed, outside of the actual military defeat of the armed Black militias at the end of Reconstruction, the physical terror against the Black people was never greater, and rarely as great as it was from approximately 1906 until about 1930. Dr. Logan says in "Betrayal of the Negro" that the highest publicized figure for lynchings in the 1880s and 1890s was 211 for the whole South in 1884 and that it went down to 96 for 1890. Dr. Logan, a careful and meticulous scholar and professor at Howard University, incorrectly assumes that the terror was mitigated in the early 20th century, because there was a slow material progress for some sections of the Black people – in the number of college students, amount of farm acreage owned, etc. But he himself shows other aspects of the matter and he quotes Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. as saying in 1906: "Lynchings are increasing and riots are more numerous ... the two races in the South are a thousand times further apart than they were fifteen years ago and the breach is widening every day."

The statistics bear out Powell more than Dr. Logan. In the two years 1921 and 1922, a period his book does not cover, there were admitted to be 135 Black people lynched in Georgia alone. Georgia Governor Dorsey said at the time, "In some counties the Negro is being driven out as though he were a wild beast. In others, he is being sold as a slave. In others, no Negro remains."

The Ku Klux Klan in the early 1920s boasted of an income of $25 million per year. It elected senators, representatives and governors, including at least one Northern governor, in Indiana, 1922. In 1924 it virtually took over the Democratic National Convention, at least sufficiently so as to block the nomi-

nation of Alfred E. Smith, who was a Klan-hating Catholic, for President, and to prevent adoption of a plank condemning the KKK. The vote on the KKK was 546 to 542.

This influence of the Klan at first seems to resemble the influence of the Populists, who also frightened the legislators and at times made them pass some legislation they wanted. But what seemed a parallel was actually a reversal. The Populists had been trying to advance the interests of the great masses and trying to destroy the hold of big business on the government. But the Klan was doing the opposite and holding down the masses, including the white masses, for the benefit of the big business it occasionally fulminated against.

There were literally millions of members in the Klan during the teens and twenties, many more than just after the Civil War. But with all their numbers and all their power; they never got any legislation passed to benefit the poor whites whom they aroused to lynch madness against the Black peoples, or even proposed any.

And yet there are liberal historians who will tell you that the Klan represented, – especially at that time, when it was so big – some kind of "Populism"!

Again, this is because the liberal mind (which is a product of the big business system in its own way, just like the mind of the Ku Klux Klan), thinks that all this Klan violence and terror, just came out of the "ignorance" of the "people." The liberal mind can never figure out why the "people" do things differently at different times and why different sections of the "people" set the tone for the rest of the people at different times.

According to the liberal mind the German people were natural-born fascists and that was why Hitler took them over from 1933 to 1945. The liberals forget that the same German people followed the *liberal*, Social Democratic, government for fifteen years before that, and fought three revolutions –1918, 1921 and 1923 – each of which tried to overthrow the big business power which first used the liberals to govern Germany and later used Hitler.

In a great social turnaround such as that from Southern Populism to the reign of the Ku Klux Klan, one of the big questions is what happens to people, what happens to their former idealism, their willingness to fight, their optimism about the battle. Where did Mrs. Lease's drive to unleash the people against "the bloodhounds of money" disappear to? What happened to the hun-

dreds of editors, the speakers, the writers of letters to the newspapers, the white defenders of Black people in the South, including those who rode all night to a town in Georgia to prevent a lynching? One of the leaders, Tom Watson, actually turned into an extreme racist himself and set the pattern for the modern Southern demagogues whose hearts bleed for the poor while they use the Black lynch rope to tie the whites to low wages and company-town politics.

The great mass of Southern Populists were no doubt stunned by Watson's renegacy just as they were crushed by Bryan's defeat. The truth is that the social forces of Populism became *exhausted.* The social goals became impossible and obviously impossible to the economic class that gave birth to the movement. This class itself was defeated, and indeed effectively destroyed as an independent entity. The end of Populism was the end of the long history of "American"-type independent farmers, craftsmen, etc., having any direct influence in governing themselves, much less governing the whole country.

The fact that the most violent expression of the death-pangs of this class, a class which began in New England, took place in the South rather than the North, or even in the West, only concealed the demise; it did not contradict it.

The new and terrible rebirth of totalitarianism in the South after the end of Populism was only the first fruit of capitalist monopoly rule over the whole country – the "strange fruit" of imperialism in a social soil where the seeds of revolution should have germinated long ago, but were choked by the racist terror of Southern goons in the service of Northern capital.

It was imperialism that created virtually all the ills of the modern South, and above all imperialism that continued the super-oppression of the Black people.

And yet, Tom Watson's renegacy and the rebirth of the Klan are often pointed out by liberal historians as examples of ... Populism!!! This development was actually the ultimate betrayal of Populism, the turning of Populism into its opposite by the tremendous power of the new monopolists of the North pressing down on their colony in the South, integrating themselves more thoroughly with the old Bourbons, bribing a certain larger number of whites at the expense of all the Blacks people, and creating what may have been the first really fascist movement of modern times – before Hitler, Mussolini or Franco were heard from.

As for Watson himself, he became a Catholic-baiter and Jew-baiter as well as a virtual lyncher of Black people. These new attributes were closely relat-

ed to the political needs of ruling a dissatisfied Anglo-Saxon colony along with a super-oppressed African-American colony for a newly imperialistic Wall Street.

The psychological and personal aspects of Watson's renegacy have interest only to those cynical liberals who want to make out that every social struggle is doomed in advance because it contains the germs of its own destruction in the form of some bad leaders, etc., and that the common people being ignorant and unschooled can easily be misled, swayed by prejudice, hatred, chauvinism and racism. But Watson was only one leader. There were hundreds of similar leaders, Black and white, now unknown, who went down to an honorable and unsung defeat at the hands of the big business oppressors of labor. And most important – Watson's new demagogy was exactly what big business needed to rule the South. If he hadn't existed, he would have had to be invented.

It was big business of course that took over the country completely in the wake of Bryan's defeat. But even at that, they simply took over politically what they already had taken economically. The political victory on the other hand helped them greatly to increase their already tight economic stranglehold. With the Spanish American War in 1898, these capitalists began to take over the world as well. Having done these things it was easy to take over the small businessmen, the country newspapers, etc. and where they could not corrupt the remaining ideological leaders of the middle class, they created new ones. Having in effect wiped out the old middle class they now destroyed the last vestiges of its political rule and expression.

Populism was, in the final analysis, a last painful cry from the small producers against the big producers who were strangling and murdering them. And after the Spanish American War and the advent of Theodore Roosevelt, the bellicose imperialist who appeased the now more diffused, but less aggressive Populist sentiment with *words* of opposition to big business, the situation was locked up completely.

"Taft's victory," in 1908, says Lundberg in "America's Sixty Families," "placed him at the head of a country very different from the one Roosevelt had inherited. In 1900, for example, there were 149 trusts of four billion dollars capitalization (altogether); when the 'trust-busting' Roosevelt breezed out of the White House, there were 10,020 with thirty-one billions of capitalization." Today the top 500 corporations alone have combined assets of

$456 billion and nearly a quarter of the whole colossal pile is owned by just the top *ten*. -V.C.

But at the very same time big business finally crushed the Populist movement, it had also to insert a slight trace of the old Populism – in words – into its own politics. So Theodore Roosevelt took on some of the reform demands of the Populists – phony "trust-busting" was only one of them. And big business liberals have come out for some restrictions and reforms of big business ever since. But this is strictly *self*-reform by the capitalists and strictly for the purpose of *saving* big business from the wrath of the people and the rebellion of the workers.

In fact, Roosevelt started his *own* pseudo-Populist party in 1912 (the "Bull Moose" Progressive Party) and ran "independently" for President. Actually backed by the Morgans, he ran against Republican Taft (who was an agent of the Rockefellers) and paved the way for Democrat Wilson, another intimate of the Morgans, to win the Presidency.

It was not until the second Roosevelt was elected in 1932 at the depth of the worst crisis the U.S. people – and U.S. big business – ever had, that the Populist, anti-corporation, anti-trust phraseology really rang out in the White House. The purpose of this, as with the New Deal legislation and subsequent concessions to the poor and oppressed, was to *quiet the masses and save the system*, keeping big business in the saddle, but making the necessary adjustments so the working-class horse would be more manageable.

But all this was done from above. At no time did the farmers or small business (much less the workers!) have the slightest direct influence on the actual government after 1900. A handful of the top banks and industrial corporations named every Cabinet member, every Supreme Court Justice, every top general, admiral, etc., through their now absolute control of the Presidency. And even the millionaires and half-millionaires became a mere *social support* for the billionaires.

Even if the economic class represented by the old Populists has not *completely* disappeared, it has lost all strength both relatively, as against the billionaires, and absolutely, to launch a political party with one-tenth the chance of taking office that the original Populist Party had.

It is true that much of "small" business is very prosperous today and it would seem that it should have some independent voice for itself in Congress,

if not in the monolithic, big business-controlled White House. But on closer inspection, it turns out that what appears to be "small business" is really nothing but a branch office of big business and not independent at all.

Take the classical case of grocery stores. Besides the openly named big chains, which are linked to the billionaire banks, there are the more camouflaged chains. These are grocers' "alliances " for instance wherein the individual stores are mere outlets for huge wholesalers. There are innumerable "franchised" stores, like the chicken roasts, beefburger stands, ice cream parlors, drive-in restaurants, etc. in which the "owner" and risk-taker is in reality a manager for a big financial empire. Even the truck-vendors for soft ice cream are either wage-workers or franchised "independents" who are harassed to death. Laundromats are mere outlets for General Electric or Westinghouse washing machines on a rental basis. And the thousands of gasoline stations are also franchised, and the manager takes all the risk and the oil company takes the profits. They are all controlled by big business. Even those small factories and machine shops which might just be classified as independent are usually in debt to the local bank, which in turn is part of a statewide chain of banks, controlled in turn by the super-banks of Morgan, Rockefeller, Mellon or Bank of America.

So the small and once independent producers who led the Populist movement and formed its real ideological leadership against the monopolies, have disappeared as a real factor in American life. Before 1900, they were revolting against the monopolies which were strangling them. But they did get strangled. Their grandchildren and great grandchildren are now the employees of the same monopolists the Populists fought against.

The radical Western and Southern farmers have all but disappeared. While a tax-shelter-seeking rancher like Robert O. Anderson, president of Atlantic-Richfield Oil, has a million acres in which to play cowboy and professionals like the owners of the King Ranch have three million acres and "farmers" like the conglomerate Tenneco Corporation have a million acres of lush garden-type farms, the great farm population of the United States, once over eighty percent of the people and the backbone of the country, has dwindled to a relative handful.

Today there are less than 2,800,000 farm families – rich *and* poor – in this whole vast country.

To understand the different role of the farmer today and the role of the propertyless production worker – or at least the potential role of the workers – we should look at the above number of farmers in the light of the following equally startling statistics:

The ten biggest U.S. corporations alone now hire 2,960,823 workers, nearly all of whom are production workers or office employees.

This one fact shows that Populism as a political movement of small business to restrain big business and break up monopoly is dead. And it also shows that a new class has replaced the old small-owning middle class – a new class which has no interest in going back to one-horse or one-mule farms and will get no benefit from reducing the billion-dollar corporations to million-dollar corporations – a new class whose best interests will be served by taking over all the corporations in the name of the whole of society.

But does this class face the same limitations that the old Populists did? And is it equally doomed to be a victim of monopoly repression on the one side and racist propaganda on the other?

On the surface, the answer to these questions appears to be "yes." Certainly that is the answer given by the liberals who are so afraid of what they call "Populism" that they prefer to support enlightened billionaires rather than try to organize the oppressed masses to overthrow the whole billionaire system.

CHAPTER 10

A new class, a new struggle – the victory will come

Since the once-powerful middle class – the vast majority of the country – was unable to stop the growth of the ruthless monopolies or to slow down the murderous drive to imperialism, how can the working class, a slave class without any property of its own in the instruments of production, how can such a class hope to succeed where the middle class Populists failed?

The working class lacks the leaders, the writers, speakers, and publicists of the old middle class. It lacks culture. And where it does have a modicum of culture, it is the culture of slavery – a capitalist soothing syrup made up of TV, baseball and perhaps higher things. Furthermore, the white section of the working class is infected, by and large, with much more conscious racism than was the white middle class of 1890. The obstacles to working class unity and the weakness of working class understanding – in fact, the class's incomprehension of its own strength – all seem to add to continued slavery for another century if not longer.

[Based on conversations with comrades who knew Vince Copeland personally, there is no reason to suppose that he meant to imply that the working-class lacks all culture. The working class has always had culture, as evidenced, for example, by the incredible musical traditions of gospel, blues, bluegrass, rock-n-roll, country music, hip hop, etc. But it is true in Copeland's time and in our own – maybe even more so today – that the big capitalists dominate cultural production and flows of information, from movie studios to social-media algorithms. This amounts to 24/7 brainwashing. – GEW]

But history is not made by angels, nor by philosophers either. Tyranny was never overthrown by a handful of poets or operatic heroes. Wrong ideas never stopped revolutions, however long they delayed them. And even the people with the wrongest ideas often have given their lives in the fight for the right,

while the sensitive souls who despaired of the masses have often turned up on the side of the masters.

The old Populists were far more conscious about Wall Street's oppression than the workers are today, far more receptive to the ideas of revolution (if not to the ideas of socialization of the means of production and the complete expropriation of big business). But the Populists were never in a *material position* to stop the growth of the big corporations, much less to overthrow them. They themselves – the Populists – were small owners, millions and millions of them. Even where they were only tenant farmers instead of owning farmers, they were still in business for themselves. They could not oppose the *principle* of the average every-day exploitation of labor which leads to the super-exploitation of masses of laborers and of whole countries, without denying their own right to be in business. And yet they did oppose the super-exploitation by Wall Street because it bore down so hard upon themselves as tiny competitors of Wall Street.

Their failure was not due nearly so much to the failure of their *ideas*, as to the failure to maintain their social position – to hold on to the material base of independent small and especially *farming* business, from which these ideas originated.

The new class, the industrial working class, does not yet have the ideas that correspond to its class position. But its class position is infinitely superior to that of the old Populists from the point of view of having the base to mount a serious and successful struggle. When the new "people-ism" of the workers is born, it will soon grow powerful enough to really lead the people and rule in the name of practically the whole people – something the Populists could not have done, even if they had won.

Today the basic opposition of material interests is not between the big monopoly producers on the one side and the small independent producers on the other. It is between the monopoly corporations and their own employees – between big business and the workers. This basic opposition has been concealed to some degree in recent years by relative prosperity, by the wars abroad. And it has been overshadowed by the super-oppression of Black, Brown, Red and other oppressed peoples at home, making it appear that the struggle is only a racial or national one and has no connection with the struggle of labor as a whole.

But the imperialists who so easily ran roughshod over the old Populists are now in trouble. Their crisis is bringing the workers' struggle as a whole once more into the forefront. Like a tremendous explosive charge, the irresistible drive for Black freedom, a drive which necessarily includes all oppressed nationalities, is being brought back into the plants.

Unlike the case with the old middle class Populists, big business cannot eliminate or absorb the workers into its system. It cannot eliminate the working class as it did the classical middle class. It must, on the contrary, keep creating *more and more* of the workers, with built-in unemployment for many of them, to be sure, even while it presses down upon them. And the potential power of these workers is equal and actually superior to that of big business itself.

When the farmers were pushed off the land, they ceased to be farmers and became *workers*, employed or unemployed. But when workers are pushed out of a plant they are still workers. As monopolies are amalgamated and merged into super-monopolies the workers still remain.

And who are they, these workers? They are not only the grandchildren and great grandchildren of the old white Populists: they are the children and sisters and brothers of the Black farmers and laborers of the South – those whose grandparents were doubly betrayed when the Populists were betrayed, and had to endure the hell of renewed lynching and neo-slavery for more than a half-century afterward. And then, when the white farmers were driven off the land, the Black farmers and Black farm laborers were driven off even more ruthlessly. The great bulk of small farmers who came to the factories in the last twenty or twenty-five years were the Black ones. The six hundred thousand farm families pushed off the land between 1960 and 1966 alone were largely from the South.

But monopoly capitalism has done its work well. In destroying the old middle class, it has not only created the new factory working class, it has also created the conditions for the welding together of the at-first-sight irreconcilable Black and white masses.

If the North has moved to the South – in the form of big capital, railroads, runaway shops, etc. and other businesses all exploiting the Black and white working people there – it is also true that the *South has moved to the North*.

The South has moved to the North in the form of Black labor pushed off the

Southern land and often denied entrance into the Northern-owned Southern factories. So far this tremendous development has apparently brought only the open racism of the South into the areas of formerly hidden racism in the North. But actually it has brought infinitely more and infinitely better than that.

Black labor and white labor are finally in almost exactly the same place – i.e. in the factory. And their sameness, that is, their equality, is expressed objectively every day and every minute in the product they make and the conditions under which they work. Whereas their conscious minds and their physical eyes see each other as different, their irrepressible class needs compel them to see each other as the same.

The cars that come off the end of a GM or Ford assembly line do not differentiate between Black and white by the thousandth of a degree of the energy poured into producing them. It takes the same amount of white muscle to do the scientifically apportioned work on the assembly line that it takes of Black muscle, and vice versa. A quart of sweat is equal to a quart of sweat. And racist as many brainwashed white workers' minds may be, they know that it takes Black and white workers together to keep the production going or to shut the plant down. They know they must unite with Black workers in the struggle for the most elementary demands if they really want to win them. This is already an accepted fact: but it is only *subconsciously* accepted.

How much more *conscious* the unity must be if there is to be a struggle for more than a few cents per hour or more than some fringe benefit that can always be taken away or challenged at the very next contract negotiations! How much more conscious the unity must be in order to achieve even half the goals the old Populists set for themselves! And for that matter, how much more conscious it must be in order to resist the inevitable drive of big business to take away, in their expensive war drive to take over the world, even the modest gains that Black and white labor have already won.

But this consciousness, apparently still far from the minds of the white workers – and even of the Black workers – must at some point explode into the brains of the workers of both races. The backwardness and racism of a large percentage of white workers is in such direct and deep conflict with the conditions of their existence, in conflict with the desperate need for unity – a need which will increase before it diminishes – that the development of

militant solidarity and Black-white worker unity is absolutely inevitable. It may surprise the workers themselves as much as it surprises their bosses: but it will come.

One of the ways that the bosses drive a wedge between Black and white workers is to create a large surplus population of Black workers which is created by a ruthlessly forced migration from the automated, big business cotton fields. Much of this surplus population is unemployed or on welfare, and big business works day and night to convince its white workers that the non-working Black workers are loafers and parasites supported by the taxes of the white. Actually the payment of welfare to unemployed workers operates like a minimum wage. Such a minimum helps the working workers to keep their wages higher, whereas a lack of welfare money might easily lead to desperate people – willing to work below the minimum and bringing down everybody else's wages.

Naturally those capitalists who are flirting with the idea of defying the whole working class with an all-out onslaught against their wages and living standards will also flirt with the idea of supporting anti-welfare demagogues like the "Populist" George Wallace. But the capitalists as a whole do not feel strong enough to do this right away, so they give their millions in campaign funds to *ordinary* racists like Nixon – or to demagogic liberals like McGovern.

But the racism engendered by the welfare question – and "busing" and job competition – is enough so that George Wallace could win big primary votes in the very heart of the most overworked and exploited auto workers in Detroit, Flint, Pontiac, Ypsilanti, etc.

It is because of this racism and because of the whole history of oppression and super-oppression of the Black people as *a people*, It is because of the betrayal of Reconstruction, because of the failure of Populism, and because of continuing super-unemployment, and sub-average pay-scales for Black workers that the advanced white workers must support the right of Black people to self-determination, including the right of separation. Within the plant, this means the right of Black workers to have Black caucuses. In special cases this also means that advanced whites should support the right of Black workers to be advanced *without* any special seniority or "qualifications" – so as to right the wrongs of the past.

This is not in contradiction to the equality now being created by the machines of Detroit and other places, but on the contrary, a formula for making the equality come alive in the given social conditions inherited from the past.

However, the machines are doing their work and the ugly racism of the past – *and the present* – is being countered by the solidarity of the future. This is happening inside precisely the factories where Wall Street capital finances the Ku Klux Klan along with the conveyor belts for Chevrolets, Fords and Chryslers.

In the spring of 1972, some weeks before Wallace got shot, some second shift workers in a Detroit GM plant were arguing heatedly during lunch hour over the coming Presidential primaries. And the supporters and opponents of Wallace divided almost exactly along racial lines, with all but three whites out of the nearly thirty supporting Wallace and *all* Black workers opposing him.

Bad as this polarization was, the next day the three anti-Wallace whites found all the workers of both races to be as friendly as ever. But more importantly, a day or two later, there was a group grievance over an aspect of the speed-up, and all the Blacks and all the whites workers signed it! Still more important, a couple of weeks later, there was a brief work stoppage which concerned nearly the whole group of Black and white who had argued over Wallace, and the participation was *unanimous*.

It is also helpful to remember that in the most strategic plants of the country, the proportion of Black and Latino workers is far higher than their proportion in the population as a whole.

Whereas the Afrrican American and Latino proportion of the whole population may come to between 15 and 20 percent, the proportion in some big cities like New York is between 35 and 40 percent. Furthermore due to discrimination and sexism, the huge office force in that city is composed of white women. The industrial workers are Black and Latino by an *absolute majority*. And except for the almost lily-white construction workers, the manufacturing force is easily 60 to 80 percent Black and Latino.

In cities like Newark, New Jersey; Washington, D.C.; Gary, Indiana; St. Louis, Missouri; Wilmington, Delaware; and dozens of smaller cities, the Black – or Black and Latino workers – are in a city-wide *majority*. And now

because of the exodus from the land and the unemployment in the North, the Black people are filling up the *Southern* cities that were once preponderantly white (e.g., Atlanta, Georgia; New Orleans, Louisiana).

Detroit, which has become a more crucial center of U.S. industry than Pittsburgh, is now half-Black and several of its plants are *predominantly* Black. Chicago may have a slightly smaller percentage of Black people, but like New York City, probably has a majority of industrial workers who are Black and certainly a *large* majority who are Black or Chicano.

In spite of racism, in spite of the white leadership of the Autoworkers' and Steelworkers' unions, this has a new and profound meaning for U.S. labor.

Imagine the case, if on a plantation of a thousand Black slaves, there had been added a thousand white slaves to endure the same agony, receive the same whippings, produce the same cotton and live in the same run-down cabins. The color line would have disappeared in the fires of revolt, and certainly in the smoke of the Civil War. And even if it did not disappear, the possibility for the unity of slaves as slaves against the white master, would continue to exist as long as these *conditions* existed.

This is somewhat the situation in modern industry – with this difference: that the wage slaves are potentially far more powerful and potentially far more united by the machine than they ever could have been by the whip alone. And they are no longer the minority, as they were in the days of Populism, but the immense majority, a one-class majority which needs only unity in order to win against the ruling class.

Another aspect of their strength is this: the nearly three million Black and white workers now working for just the ten top corporations (see preceding chapter for figures) are not only greater in number than all the remaining farmers in this country – *they are also greater than the number of all the adult slaves in the eleven states of the Old South at the beginning of the Civil War!*

It is as if all those slaves from all that territory had moved together to work under ten roofs, bringing all their passionate opposition to slavery into those confined areas. It is as if the isolated bands of Nat Turner, Gabriel, Denmark Vesey, John Brown. and Madison Washington had had railroads and airplanes and television at their disposal and had been able to march into the front office of all the plantation owners combined.

True, the big monopolies have by no means dug their own graves yet. But they certainly have brought their own grave-diggers into the bosom of their factories and given them the spades and shovels to do the work. They never did this for the old Populists, you can be sure!

Where Populism could not come to grips with its enemy other than by denunciation and political rhetoric – good as the rhetoric was – the forces of the modern working class are growing in the very guts of Populism's old enemy and now have him by the bowels and the heart as well as by the jugular vein. Where Populism, even in its most revolutionary period, could use no other material force than the ballot (which its monopolist enemies already controlled, although not as much as they do today), the 80 million-strong working class has a material power against its masters that can effectively *overthrow them*, once it makes the inevitable decision to do so.

It is true that there were strikes of the workers even during the Populist period. But these bitter struggles – and the Populists did support them as we have seen – were launched in the swashbuckling era of the robber barons, who could shoot the workers down almost at will. Only a small portion of the workers were organized at all. And the very existence of the huge farming class from which Populism got its main support, was also a social support to the robber baron monopolies, since the competitive small producers had so many reasons to support the system in which they might vainly hope to become larger producers themselves.

Now the diametrical opposite prevails and the political support of the workers for their bosses is completely due to indoctrination and deceit, while the *social position* of the workers is pressing inexorably toward a fundamental showdown between big business on the one side and Black and white labor on the other.

How is this showdown to be prepared'? How is the true "people-ism" of the people to be realized? Naturally, a *program* is necessary, as is a dedicated leadership to carry out that program. The real fight for the people means standing up to the Klan, for instance, and wiping it out. It means beating the racists ideologically and physically. It means organizing Southern labor and conquering Southern industry. It means whites fighting for Black equality on the job – organizing white workers to beat the bosses economically and politically by uniting with Black workers. In addition to whites supporting

the right of Blacks workers to have independent Black caucuses, etc., it means Blacks supporting the progressive fight against the union bureaucrats and continuing to be the best militants against the companies and shaming the more backward whites into progressive actions wherever possible. It means building the advance guard of the working class inside the industries of the monopolistic, imperialist enemy, and educating the general ranks as well as the vanguard.

The leadership that will carry out this program among the workers, and in fact among the general public, has to be built at the shop level against the foremen and the general foremen as well as against the top owners in Wall Street. It has to be built in the neighborhoods, especially the super-oppressed neighborhoods of the minority peoples and nations. It has to be built among the unemployed as well as the employed.

But above all, it has to be built as a conscious political party different from the old Populist Party, in that every single member is devoted to the goal of social revolution, the overthrow of the monopoly capitalists and their government, and spends every waking moment of his or her life, even while creating profits for the bosses, to helping the workers defeat their old enemy and leading the people to a new and better life of equality and self-government.

This is socialism. In fact, it is communism. And it is also "people-ism" - *real* "people-ism." Long live the struggle of our Black and white great-grandparent Populists! And long live the revolutionary, multi-national working class of today who will bring the struggle to its progressive and positive outcome in a socialist society!

About Vince Copeland

1915 -1993

Vincent Copeland, a labor union leader who opposed the Korean War in a period of unbridled red-baiting, was a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist writer and activist.

Beginning in the mid-1940s, Copeland served as a United Steel Workers Local 2601 grievance committee member and editor of the union newspaper at the Bethlehem Steel plant in Lackawanna, New York, an industrial suburb of Buffalo. He was fired in October 1950 for leading a number of wildcat strikes in the blast furnace department after the company filled desirable job openings with new hires instead of the Black blast furnace workers.

His firing evoked a tumultuous struggle in which, first, the blast furnace workers, and eventually all 16,000 steelworkers at the plant, walked out demanding his reinstatement. Copeland wrote a popular pamphlet called "Blast Furnace Brothers," which explained why solidarity and unity with oppressed Black workers was essential to the struggle to improve working conditions for all.

Copeland was in the earliest protests against the U.S. war in Vietnam, which built up to New York's 1966 march of 100,000, in which he played a leading role. He supported the struggle for socialism in the USSR, China, Cuba, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

In 1961, he was ejected from the United Nations for protesting when U.S. Ambassador Wadsworth announced the breaking of diplomatic relations with revolutionary Cuba.

As well as "Southern Populism and Black Labor," Copeland authored analyses of U.S. imperialism in works such as: "Expanding Empire," ‘’The Built-in U.S. War Drive," and "Lenin, Thinker and Fighter," His book Market Elections" dissected U.S. capitalist politics.

In 1974, he rescued Osborne P. Anderson's pamphlet from oblivion in "A Voice from Harper's Ferry, 1859." It is an account written by Anderson in 1861. He was the only surviving Black revolutionary who fought alongside John Brown. The final edition included Copeland's essay "The Unfinished Revolution" on the Civil War and a commentary by Mumia Abu-Jamal on "The Neglected Voices from Harpers's Ferry."

Beginning in 1984, despite ill health and asthma suffered from the time he rescued a co-worker who had fallen into a steel pit, Copeland became a well-known progressive figure in Jersey City, New Jersey. He organized many rallies in the Senior-Junior reduced bus fare campaign. Along with others, he occupied the Medical Center in 1987 to stop its planned closing.

Copeland was known to stir political rallies with his powerful oratory and resonant speaking voice. Activists may not have known that he had begun an acting career in the 1930s, sharing the stage with figures like Katherine Cornell, Lillian and Dorothy Gish, Ethel Waters and José Ferrer in a number of Broadway productions. He won acclaim for his Shakespearean roles as a member of the company of the Butler Davenport Free Theater.

He left the stage in 1939, having decided to devote all his time to the socialist movement and the struggles of the working class.

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CHINA
Celebrating 75 years of liberation

October 1, 2024, marked the 75th anniversary of China's transformative revolution, which liberated the nation from feudal oppression and imperialist control.

Under the leadership of Mao Zedong, the Communist Party of China achieved what many deemed impossible – inspiring not just China but working and oppressed peoples worldwide.

The revolution brought an end to China's 'Century of Humiliation,' which began with British imperialism's First Opium War in 1839. Over the past 75 years, there has been significant progress for the masses and China's working class.

Today, China stands as a global scientific powerhouse, boasting achievements in pollution reduction, and space exploration. The People's Republic has made significant strides in healthcare, education, and sports.

At no point has U.S. monopoly capitalism adopted a hands-off approach toward the development of socialism in China or elsewhere. The maneuvers by U.S. imperialism have been increasingly more dangerous and now point in the direction of war.

This book, **'The U.S. War Drive Against China: What it means for workers,'** aims to illuminate the growing dangers posed by a potential U.S. war against China and to reveal the real enemies of the working class.

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War & Lenin in the 21st Century

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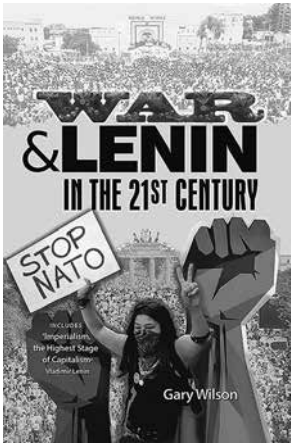

Vladimir Lenin, the revolutionary leader of the Soviet Union and a key contributor to Marxist theory, wrote **"Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism"** in 1916, more than a century ago. It remains an influential critique of imperialism.

When WWI broke out, Lenin's main interest was promoting a socialist revolution to end the war. He exposed the war's economic roots and identified imperialism's key features: monopoly capitalism, finance capital, the export of capital, and colonialism – the imperialist division of the world.

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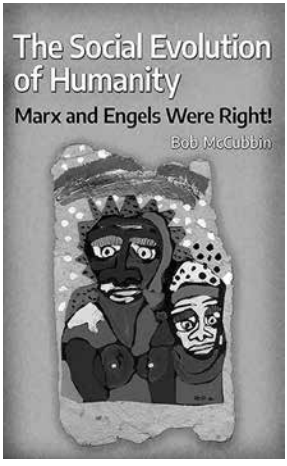
The Social Evolution of Humanity

Marx and Engels were right! Bob McCubbin



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Against fascism
Reclaiming populism's legacy for today's class struggle

Fascist movements are on the rise worldwide, attacking working-class and oppressed people. The authors of this collection argue that capitalism's inherent dynamics are the cause, as with fascism in the 20th Century. Fascism is the capitalist class' response to a system in crisis. They use racism and misogyny, transphobia and homophobia to beat back the diverse working class while amassing more wealth.

But workers beat back fascism before and can do it again. Workers have the power to eliminate the root cause of fascism by transforming society with socialist revolution. This book is about getting us there.

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